

Negro Digest

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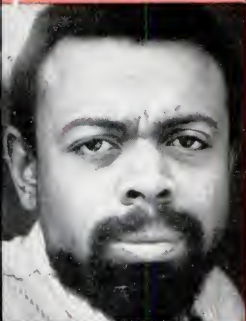
The Negro In **THE AMERICAN THEATRE**

Featuring Articles By

FREDERICK O'NEAL • OSSIE DAVIS

RUBY DEE • JAMES BALDWIN

LE ROI JONES • AND OTHERS



FESTIVAL TIME

in

Dakar, Senegal

World Stage for Negro Artists

For Your Bookshelf



THE NEGRO POLITICIAN:

HIS SUCCESS AND FAILURE

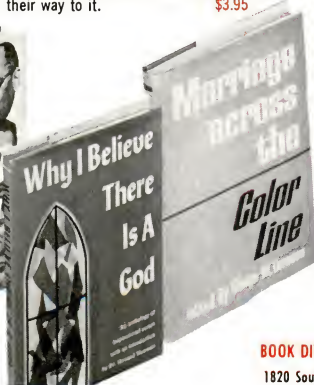
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*The Negro in
Today's Theatre*

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

BY FREDERICK O'NEAL



Frederick O'Neal, keynote contributor to this special feature, "The Negro in the American Theatre," is the president of Actor's Equity Association. Mr. O'Neal has long been a stalwart in the struggle for equal opportunity in the arts



FOR a number of years, Negroes were not allowed to perform on the legitimate stage in America. Negro characters were played by white actors in blackface. Down through the years casting patterns in the various entertainment media have changed to some extent, but not very much.

During the period, roughly between 1910 and 1930, Negro stars such as Bert Williams and others were spotted in white shows as if they were so "super special" that they had to be shown in almost wholly unrelated roles and mostly alone. They were just the darlinest, quaintest, oddest, most interesting, sexiest, most exotic or, in other words, just about the best thing in the show, but not really a part of it. The most common method of handling the Negro actor in the straight play was to cast him exclusively in so-called "Negro roles," which inevitably meant in some servile capacity, such as the maid, butler, cook, *etc.* Let it be clearly understood here that there is nothing wrong with servant and comedy roles *per se*; the criticism stems from the characterization, presentation and interpretation of these parts, which until recently, took the form of lazy, shuffling characters speaking a dialect that even Negroes had

never heard. The *types* of roles played by Negroes are more of a barometer than the number of these roles.

The Negro actor feels that he is grossly discriminated against in the casting of shows in all of the entertainment media. Surely his talents could have been used in many parts in a manner that would not have distorted the artistic concept of the production. Indeed, in many instances, it would have enhanced such values. It would seem that Negroes and Orientals are the only groups whose roles are circumscribed by race. The Irish actor can play a Japanese character; the Jewish actor can play the Indian; German actors play Italian characters, and *vice versa*, but the Negro actor only has a chance of being cast if the part specifically indicates "Negro."

The imagination of the agent, casting director, play director, playwright or manager, preoccupied with time-worn casting patterns, does not extend beyond the racially designated description in the manuscript. But, these same individuals have no difficulty whatsoever with their imaginations when it comes to the selection of, perhaps, a David Wayne for the part of the Japanese character Sakini in *Teahouse Of The August Moon*, or of Jeff Chandler as an American Indian.

Now all of this may sound strange and contradictory when we realize that, by and large, people of the theater have been opposed to discrimination, segregation and other forms of bigotry and hypocrisy. Actor's Equity Association is the union which has jurisdiction over those actors, dancers and singers who work in the legitimate theatre. The Council (its governing body) includes seven Negro members and one officer among the seventy-two members. For almost twenty years, Equity and the League of New York Theatres (the organization of theatrical producers) have worked in cooperation with other elements inside as well as outside the theatre community to make this area of entertainment free and healthy. The League, Equity, the Dramatists' Guild and other organizations and individuals have, on more than one occasion, joined together to defeat the threat of official censorship. During the dark days of McCarthyism, the Anti-Blacklist Committee in Actors' Equity, working with the League, managed to keep the theatre relatively free from political persecution and the principle of guilt by association. As a result of this kind of cooperative effort, the theatre has remained the most free of all entertainment media, while being ever mindful of its collective and individual responsibility and obligation to the public served.

In the mid 1940's, Washington, D. C. was one of the most lucrative stops on the touring theatre circuit, but the management of the National Theatre in that city maintained a policy of racial discrimination. The League and Equity pleaded with the management to drop this vicious and immoral policy, and when this request was refused, these two organ-



izations, together with members of the Dramatists' Guild, decided to refuse bookings in this or any other theatre in Washington until such time as the management could see fit to change this policy. This was in 1948. The National Theatre remained closed for the next five years while touring shows played the Gayety Theatre, a former vaudeville house that had dropped this discriminatory policy. The National was finally remodeled and redecorated under a new management and re-opened in 1952, with a welcome to all races and nationalities on a completely non-discriminatory basis.

Inasmuch as Washington was just about the most segregated city in the United States at that time, perhaps it was this collective action that broke the dam of prejudice and bigotry, releasing the first wave of such changes that have taken place in that city since 1952. It was a healthy action that could only terminate in a wholesome result.

Since 1962, by contractual agreement, Equity does not permit its members to work in any theatre where segregation and discrimination are practiced. Inquiries are often made of the union as to the number of Negroes there are among its 14,000 members. Due to the fact that the racial background of members is not indicated in the union's records, no one actually knows. Some say a thousand or more; others maintain that the figure is much lower. Equity's Ethnic Minorities Committee has made an unofficial effort to determine the number of Negro members of the union by inquiry among members, both Negro and white, as to their knowledge of all Negro actors known to them as members of Equity. After examining a number of lists submitted, we found a great deal of duplication. But, from this somewhat unorthodox method, we learned that the figure is around 400. There may be Negro artists who are members of other performing unions, such as: American Guild of Musical Artists, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, American Guild of Variety Artists and Screen Actors Guild. Actors' Equity's jurisdiction is only over those actors, singers and dancers who perform on the legitimate stage in the United States and Canada. Such jurisdiction also includes some industrial shows, a few night club shows, musical theatres, summer stock, *etc.*

Each year many young Negro and white actor "hopefuls" knock on the doors of producers. They all look forward to a successful career in the theatre. Many inquire as to the chances for such success. Such chances vary somewhat according to the individual, but on the whole, they are pretty much the same for whites as for Negroes, except that the chances of those of "high visibility" are diminished or complicated by the existence of color.

A great deal of the imagined interest in and fitness for a career in the theatre is occasioned by the very rare freak success of a newcomer to

the profession. Such a case is usually accompanied by reams of news stories and in some instances they are stories not really about a newcomer, but about a well trained and experienced actor or actress being given a publicity buildup and the "newcomer" tag is but a useful gimmick. Unlike many other professions, it is very difficult to establish oneself in the theatre. There are many heartaches, disappointments and frustrations. In some cases, this has led to mental instability.

The American Negro, as a whole, has plumbed more levels of society—economic, religious, political, *etc.*—than any other comparable group. Such experiences are of particular value to the Negro actor, especially in contemporary drama. Where more restrained portrayals are demanded, however, as in the classics, we have not fared too well. Such style demands dedicated study and effort. Far too many members of the profession (black and white) have aligned themselves with the generally accepted lay opinion that one does not have to study in order to become an actor or actress. Within the last few years that segment of the profession has dwindled considerably and to the point where we now have a fairly large group of competent young actors and actresses who are ready for almost any assignment.

If the Negro actor aspirant will remember all this and also that his chances of success are further complicated by the fact that he is a Negro, then I would suggest he secure a copy of the book *Opportunities in Acting* by Dick Moore, published by Universal Publishing and Distributing Corporation in the Vocational Guidance Manuals series. It was written in answer to the many questions asked by those who are seriously considering acting as a career.

The prospects for the Negro actor in search of a career in the theatre are further lessened by the fact that many producers feel the so-called "Negro Show" is not a good financial risk (as theatrical investments go) compared to investments in white shows. They seem to forget about many successful Negro shows which have been produced for years. One could include among them such plays as *Green Pastures*, *Shuffle Along*, *Porgy and Bess*, *Carmen Jones*, and *Emperor Jones*. *Anna Lucasta* still remains among the all-time record holders for Broadway runs of straight plays. Paul Robeson's *Othello* holds the all-time record for the Broadway run of a Shakespearean play. Even with the bad judgment exercised by some producers in their selection of Negro plays, it is quite possible that

an objective survey would indicate that there is a greater proportion of success among these Negro shows based on the total number produced than white shows under similar circumstances.

The availability of stars also plays a great part in the decision of producers. The legitimate stage has not, peculiarly enough, developed many Negro stars. Not one of the current crop of luminaries was developed by the theatre, and yet plays have been shelved for lack of a competent available Negro star of sufficient magnitude to head such productions. This does not mean that Negro actors are not available who could do just as well or possibly better than the desired stars, but the precarious economic position of the commercial theatre does not allow for such experimentation.

In some lay circles, the term "star" has been used rather loosely to the extent it has lost a great deal of its former meaning, except to those producers, theatrical investors and others who still know and respect the true meaning of the term. Frequently, actors are referred to as having "starred" in this or that play, when in reality the parts played and the billing (if any) given these actors are not even comparable to feature recognition. In the trade, the word "star" is applied to an actor or actress who has reached a stage of artistic development to the extent that they can lend favorable influence to the box office potential. Once such personalities have attracted a considerable public following, they are in the contractual position to demand that their names, now synonymous with a well desired trade mark, be placed above the title of the play (or directly beneath it in very large letters). True, in many cases, this position is not well earned, but such rewards are not without consideration for commercial values. Opportunities for Negro actors in the legitimate theatre are so few it is seldom, if ever, they can grow steadily to the point where they can reach the star category.

The legitimate theatre has been forced to borrow Negro personalities that have been developed in other media. Many a star has found his original medium more lucrative though, and cannot afford the occasional luxury of doing a play or musical. Top box-office attractions such as Lena Horne and Sammy Davis are not always available and quite often the roles to be filled are not suited to the particular talents and personalities of this small group. Since the employment of Negro stars usually means the employment of Negro supporting players, whenever a play is shelved or abandoned, it follows that a number of Negro actors have been denied a chance to develop towards the star circle. This box-office draw of such stars as Miss Horne and Mr. Davis was demonstrated in their last appearances on Broadway. Both appeared in plays that did not receive very favorable critical comment, yet Miss Horne's vehicle, *Ja-maica*, and Mr. Davis' *Mr. Wonderful*, had runs of more than a year.

Mr. Davis' latest musical, *Golden Boy*, is still running at this writing and playing to full capacity each week with no end in sight, despite not too favorable reviews. Without a doubt, such plays would have closed long since with lesser names. This would be true of shows with white stars as well.

The existence of the "Star System" today is largely due to the desire of the producer to exploit that which he feels creates in the potential theatre-goer a desire to fork over the price of admission. In this respect, he has created what he now terms a "frankenstein." Essentially, a star's success is related to the star's ability to attract customers to the box-office.

The figures on the employment of Negroes during the past season, 1964-65, as compared to previous seasons are somewhat interesting.

During the above period the total employment of Negro actors on and Off-Broadway dropped considerably from that of the previous season (1963-64). The total number of jobs filled by Negro actors reached a new high during the 1963-64 season. Figures for the last five years are as follows.

	1964-65	1963-64	1962-63	1961-62	1960-61
Jobs Available					
On Bdwy.	74	168	51	123	126
Off-Bdwy.	32	116	26	50	29
Number shows employing Negroes					
On Bdwy.	22	24	21	14	18
Off-Bdwy.	20	27	12	20	9
Number shows with integrated casts					
On Bdwy.	15	16	13	10	8
Off-Bdwy.	11	11	7	11	4

The drop in the total number of jobs available to Negro actors during the season 1964-65, as in certain other past periods, is mainly due to the number of shows produced with predominantly- or all-Negro casts. For example, during the 1963-64 season, three shows: *Porgy and Bess* (46), *Tambourines to Glory* (29), *Sponono* (24) accounted for 99 of the total number of 168 employed that year. This was all but 69 of the total. That same season Off-Broadway, three shows, *Jericho Jim*

Crow (20), *Ballad for Bimshire* (26) and *Cabin in the Sky* (18) accounted for all but 52 of the total employed in that area. A total of 67 shows were produced on Broadway last season and 63 during the 1963-64 season.

The most important figures are those under the heading Number of Shows with Integrated Casts. These figures indicate parts played by Negroes that are not designated by the author as so-called "Negro Parts," where race is not thematically necessary to the story and not so directed as to imply racial identification. It will be noted that these figures have held up pretty well and, in fact, increased somewhat.

In addition to the increasing number of Negro artists being used in non-racially designated roles, another encouraging factor is the number of Negro playwrights whose works have been produced in recent years. All of them are not necessarily new playwrights, but with the possible exception of Langston Hughes, they are new to Broadway and Off-Broadway. Such writers as James Baldwin, LeRoi Jones, Lorraine Hansberry (deceased), Louis Peterson, Ann Flagg, Adrienne Kennedy, Errol John, Ossie Davis, William Hairston, Lofton Mitchell, Alice Childress, Irving Burgie, Abram Hill and William Branch have been presented to Broadway or Off-Broadway during the past ten or fifteen years. The works of 10 of these writers have been produced during the past five years.

Some of these new playwrights might be classified in the "Angry Young Man" category who sometimes forget that the primary requisite for a good play is its ability to entertain. It must first get and hold the attention of the audience. If this is not done, one might as well be talking to oneself. Surely there is a place in the theatre for ideas, convictions, points of view, but the craftsmanship and technique of playwriting must be employed to express these ideas and convictions in terms of good theatre.

For a number of years the Negro writer seemed to approach his work out of a peculiar psychological or doctrinal fixation. That is, his work takes on a conscious or unconscious protest. It is very difficult for him to develop or summon forth that degree of confidence, self-assurance and inner dignity to approach his work without a certain degree of emotional preoccupation. And, sometimes, that same emotional preoccupation destroys craftsmanship and technique. The result is that the literary work suffers.

Dr. Alain Locke wrote in 1927 as follows: "Propaganda, pro-Negro and anti-Negro, has scotched the dramatic potentialities of the subject (Negro Drama). Especially with the few Negro playwrights has the propaganda motive worked havoc. They have had the dramatic motive deflected at its source. Race drama has appeared to them a matter of race vindication, and pathetically, they have pushed forward their moral-

istic allegories or melodramatic protests as dramatic correctives and antidotes for race prejudice."

Today, however, the Negro playwright, having become aware of his potential strength in the battle for full citizenship, has been able to overcome a certain amount of this emotional preoccupation. The result is and will be that his work will take on a higher degree of technical perfection and literary value.

In addition to the established and promising Negro playwrights, there is further reason for optimism occasioned by some degree of progress in other areas.

In recent years, one or two stage managers have emerged, such as: Charles Blackwell, formerly of David Merrick Productions and now working with Harry Belafonte; James Wall, working in a similar capacity in television; Irving Vincent; Maxwell Glanville, currently playing a role in *Golden Boy*, and one or two others.

The work of two Negro directors was seen on Broadway during the past season. Frank Silvera directed *Amen Corner* as well as co-produced the play with Mrs. Nat Cole, and Lloyd Richards was represented by the musical *I Had A Ball* and he will direct another show this season. Other Negro directors who have directed on or Off-Broadway during the past two seasons are Osceola Archer, Edward Cambridge and Vinette Carroll. Donald McKayle has established himself as one of the top flight choreographers, having served as assistant choreographer for *West Side Story*, *Red Head*, and more recently as choreographer for *Golden Boy*. Albert Popwell directed the dances for the revival of *South Pacific* at the New York City Center. Others of this group are Katherine Dunham, Walter Nicks, Talley Beatty and Alvin Ailey.

In addition to Frank Silvera and Mrs. Nat Cole, Irving Burgie, Ellis Haislip and Ossie Davis can be added to the list of Negro producers. This group, as well as the Negro playwrights, can be very instrumental in expanding opportunities for Negroes in the American theatre.

George McClain has worked in several management capacities and is now Assistant Manager of the St. James Theatre. He has served as Company Manager for several large productions on pre-Broadway tours. Dick Campbell was Company Manager for the Langston Hughes show, *Tambourines to Glory* and for *Ballad for Bimshire*. He is currently working for Crossroads Africa, the product originated by Rev. James Robinson and after which the Peace Corps was patterned.

One of the more successful talent agents is Ernestine McClendon, who holds franchises from all of the major performer unions. Her clients include almost as many white artists as Negroes.

There is a growing use of Negro musicians in the pit orchestras of Broadway shows and, since the desegregation of the New York locals of

the Stage Hands Union, Negro craftsmen are working the Broadway theatres. Perry Watkins, veteran Negro scenic designer, has also produced on Broadway. He is currently working with Duke Ellington on his new show.

Civil Rights organizations are beginning to realize that the Negro creative artist, and particularly the playwright and actor, exert the greatest influence in the establishment of the Negro image.

Conferences are currently being held with the NAACP in the hope of establishing an NAACP National Performing Artists Advisory Committee as a permanent department within the national office with a staff person on both the East and West Coasts to pursue on a continuing basis the ultimate objective of complete desegregation of the performing arts.



Easter Comes Tardily

We saw you stripped, dark Christ:
Sweat glistened your black body
And blood dripped as we listened to a lash
Louder than man-sobs stifled in dank dirt.
A litany of days dulls the mind
To deprivation when the pain is private
To another man.

We watched your body beamed,
our pity momentary as the breeze brushing
your numbered bones. Men called it prudence
when we mouthed a stone entombing words
that could have helped to save you.

We saw you die, remembering instead
the play of sunshine on a glass of wine
and various pleasures we preferred
to watching you hang. We hoped your death
would be the end to injustice.
Hypocrisy is a grimy glass to look through.
Will it take that final lance thrust
of your glance to shatter it to taller vision?

SISTER M. EMMANUEL

Eulogy To This Fair Soldier

I

EPITAPH

(For a certain black soldier who died
in Viet Nam)

His eyes were innocent and young
His blood was quick with fire
His heart and country beat as one
So strong was his desire.

They told him of this iron cause
They told him of his duty
And he responded without pause
To this fair, blue eyed beauty.

Although this maid he fought to save
Was not in serious danger,
Yet, he believed, he marched, he gave
And died to truth, a stranger.

II

A LAMENT

FOR SAMUEL YOUNGE JR.

(21 year old Tuskegee student and
Civil Rights worker slain)

Oh how many more in the warm
Bloom of their blood,
How many more in the strong
Beat of their heart,
How many more in the young
Sap of their spring
Shall die before we know
This new day's dawn?

How many more blind suns
Shall crawl the sky,
How many shrouds of clouds,
How many bloated moons
Of night shall draw
The sea
Before we know
This new day's dawn?

—ZACK GILBERT

*Earl Hyman, Hilda Simms and
Georgia Burke in a scene from
Anna Lucasta*



Back To The "Harlems"

THE FLIGHT FROM BROADWAY

BY OSSIE DAVIS

WHEN I came to Harlem in 1939, I joined a flourishing community theatre, sponsored by Dick Campbell and Muriel Rahn: the Rose McClendon Players, where I got my basic training as an actor, and as a playwright. It is impossible for me to imagine having had any kind of meaningful life in the theatre without this training, and I feel this must have been true for most of the student performers whom I met and worked with there.

The Rose McClendon Players was a community theatre in the true sense of the word: it cultivated and serviced the Harlem Community with high-grade theatrical entertainment which gave Negroes a chance to see their own lives reflected on stage (at least four plays a season to a subscription audience); it gave burgeoning Negro playwrights a chance—which they could get nowhere else—to see their plays mounted and performed; and it gave Negro actors, stage managers, set designers, and assorted technicians, a chance to learn and to practice their craft—under the best instruction.

With the coming of World War II, the Rose McClendon Players disbanded, but its work was taken up and advanced by the American Negro Theatre, founded by Frederick O'Neal and Abram Hill. A.N.T. as it came to be called, was even more intensive and extensive in its



Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis rehearsing for National Educational Television's "The Creative Person" series.

operations, and from its roster has come such Theatre people as O'Neal himself, Ruby Dee, Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Hilda Simms, Earle Hyman, Max Glanville, and a host of others. It is difficult to imagine the American theatrical scene as we know it today in the absence of these performers. It is equally difficult to imagine they could have made such an impactful contribution, had they not had a theatre workshop—had they not had A.N.T.—at which to learn and to practice their craft. No further argument is needed—it seems to me—of the indisputable and irreplaceable value, both to actors and playwrights, etc.—and to the Harlem community itself—of a Community Theatre.

But Harlem had had no significant community theatre since A.N.T. closed up shop in 1949-1950. Why? I think the decisive answer is that Broadway discovered A.N.T.'s production of *Anna Lucasta* in 1944, and gobbled it up. That, I believe, was the beginning of the end. For, suddenly, there was a place "downtown," on Broadway, for Negro actors. The end of a war fought in part against racial intolerance had come, and Broadway decided to introduce a new concept of the Negro to the American Public. Plays like *Deep Are The Roots*, *Jeb*, *Strange Fruit*, *On Whitman Avenue*, and later *Native Son*, all followed *Anna Lucasta*. And most of the functioning cadre of A.N.T. joined the march into the theatrical mainstream. There was effort from time to time to fall back and regroup, to keep the old establishment going out of the blood, sweat and tears of those who remained to the end. But it was hopeless. The suction, the sweeping undercurrent, flowing towards Broadway, only a subway ride away, was irresistible. And a great community theatre, so absolutely essential to the spiritual life of the community, passed away almost without protest.

Many regretted its passing who felt that a certain tone, a certain richness, had gone out of the lives of our people, and who sought in various ways, and at various times, to build up another theatre to replace the one that had flown away on the wings of success. But the times were against the idea. Integration, the movement of the Negro people outward from their ghetto confinement, into the mainstream of American life and culture: that was the objective. Too long had we Negro actors, playwrights, directors, etc., fought to get onto Broadway and been, by and large, denied; too long had we been forced to stand on the outside looking in. Now that the doors were open at last—or so we thought—we must make every effort to move through. To stop now, and devote any of our time and energy to building a theatre in Harlem, would be to look backwards—in effect, to re-segregate ourselves, after years of struggling to breakdown segregation!

No one can deny that integration has come to Broadway, that, though much remains to be done, the Negro is now included, meaningfully, in

most aspects of Broadway life: certainly, he will not find any statutory limits or barriers to his activities. The Negro is accepted in a way that was unthinkable prior to *Anna Lucasta*.

But accepted into what?

Broadway, itself, is in a spiral of inflated production costs, which makes it more and more difficult for theatre to dare try and make a real contribution to American culture, and rising ticket prices that drive more and more people away from its doors every season.

And while the Negro actor, playwright, director, etc., can still look to Broadway as an arena for the gainful exercise of his talent, that arena, itself, grows smaller and smaller, as every year fewer and fewer plays make it to Broadway at all, and fewer and fewer of that few survive beyond the first week.

And what of the Negro Community or, in more up to date terms, the Negro audience? Can it hope to have its own spiritual and cultural requirements met on Broadway as they formerly were met by the Rose McClendon Players and the American Negro Theatre? Now, when the submerged aspirations of the Negro are beginning, to surface in a more and more disturbing and revolutionary fashion, *a la* Watts?

Can Broadway, as it now lies—slowly dying of economic strangulation, its voice essentially inaudible on the burning issues of our time: Vietnam, Watts, Poverty, Crime, Mississippi, etc.—really speak to the needs of the Negro community, or any other community?

In the thirties, Broadway was a cockpit where significant ideas were fought and bled over. Today, it is on television that McCarthy and his “ism” came a cropper; or that South Vietnam, at last, manages to engage the attention of the nation; it is a motion picture, like *Dr. Strangelove*, that brings us face to face with the realities of atom power politics. And even more significantly, it is to our novelist, and writers of essays that we turn now for serious discussions of our social plight. What playwright, or play, is more relevant to the major turbulences of our times—or can command a larger and more attentive audience—than James Baldwin and his essays, LeRoi Jones and his poems, or John O. Killens and his novels?

Tobacco Road was about rural poverty among whites. It was of another time and quite successful as good theatre and as social comment. Such a play of our times about urban poverty among Negroes and Puerto Ricans might do equally well on both counts. But, plays about Negroes, especially “unpleasant” plays about Negroes—i.e. Baldwin’s *Blues For Mr. Charlie*, do not make money. What producer, knowing today’s costs of production, would want to risk offending his audiences’ sensibilities at today’s ticket prices? (Incidentally, Mr. Baldwin’s *Amen Corner*, which was not “unpleasant”—in that it

did not make the predominantly white Broadway audiences feel guilty—was not successful.)

True, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin In The Sun* did make money, but her *Sign In Sidney Brustein's Window* did not. My own play, *Purlie Victorious*, stayed on Broadway seven and a half months, and can be counted an artistic success. But Phil Rose, our producer, Ruby, and I had to take money out of our pockets to keep it there . . . money we never got back. Another play, off-Broadway, in which I was associate producer, *Ballad For Bimshire*, an excellent musical, also failed.

What I am trying to say is, that while there are no impediments to plays about the truth of Negro experience being produced on Broadway, such productions, so far, have not succeeded—have not been “hits” in the sense that *Anna Lucasta* was. The Negro Community can find its anguish, and its joys, mirrored faithfully, and profitably, in books, in magazines, and in the news on television, but on Broadway—no dice. The great hope that we would be included into the mainstream American Theatre—the hope which led us to abandon our own independent community theatre in Harlem—has been realized in form, but defeated in substance. What shall we do, we Negroes, about our needs for living theatre, both as performers, and as member of the Negro community?

I think we must first realize what is happening to Broadway. Broadway as we know it is changing. Theatre is becoming decentralized, and Americans will, in the future, look less and less to Broadway as the end-all and be-all of Drama, just as we no longer look to Hollywood for what is of real consequence in Motion Pictures. We, too, must move with the times—and we are.

Community theatres and Repertory Acting Companies are springing up in various places, bent more on serving the needs of their own communities, than on trying to imitate Broadway. A tremendous proliferation of non-Broadway oriented theatre groups is taking place all over our country. I am, myself, a member of the Founding Committee of the American Negro Theatre, Inc. which aims to secure foundation grants to build a theatre in Harlem. Already, Kenneth Whitlock, with his Prospect Park Summer theatre, Robert Hooks and Barbara Ann Teer, with their Group Theatre Workshop, Roger Furman and his New Heritage Theatre, and LeRoi Jones, and his Black Arts Theatre, are beginning the Flight from Broadway—the long trip back home. Surely, we shall see a new Community Theatre—not only in Harlem, but in all American communities—not yet, but soon. Old habits die slowly, and Broadway was, and is still, one of the sentimental landmarks in American culture. I will hate to see it lose face. I will hate to see the sceptre pass to other places than New York. But Broadway

grows less and less able to satisfy the cultural needs not only of the nation, but even of New York City itself.

I believe that we, being Negroes, have a special thing to say to ourselves and to the world, of our own daily lives which only theatre can express, and I believe we have a special need to celebrate the rediscovery of our people, which only the theatre can fulfill. Potentially, nobody can make more spiritual capital out of the coming decentralization of the theatre than we can—and no other groups need it more than we do. Broadway's loss is bound to be Harlem's gain.

At least I hope so.

And I want to be there when it happens!



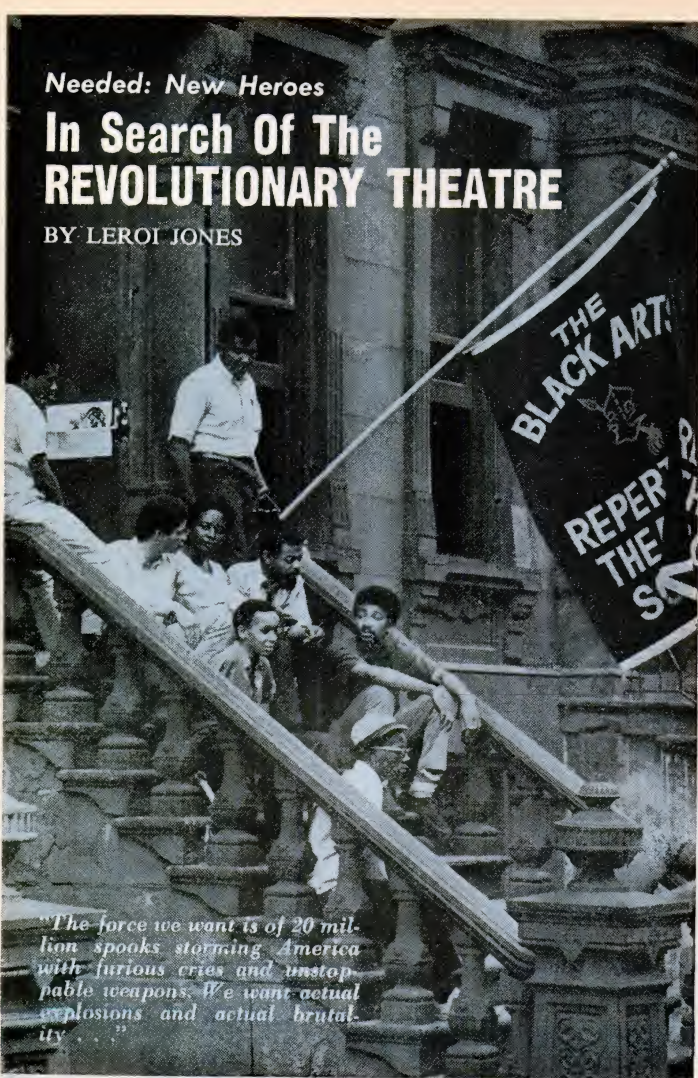
Bright guide to freedom in the northern sky,
That whispered, "Liberty!" to the chained slave,
Whose throbbing promise urged him on to brave
Gun, hound, and rattler, knowing he might die,
How often in the night beneath your eye,
Panting, sweating, hearing the bloodhounds rave,
He plunged for safety into venomous wave,
How often rose to you his slivering cry
When at the last their fangs had found his flesh,
The whip had ripped his back, and, his hands bound,
He felt upon his brow the red-hot brand
And rolled in agony on bloody ground.
Still calm you looked, and still you would unleash
Your glittering summons to a Promised Land.

—DUDLEY RANDALL

Needed: New Heroes

In Search Of The REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE

BY LEROI JONES



"The force we want is of 20 million spooks storming America with furious cries and unstoppable weapons. We want actual explosions and actual brutality . . ."

THE Revolutionary Theatre should force change, it should be change. (All their

faces turned into the lights and you work on them black nigger magic, and cleanse them at having seen the ugliness and if the beautiful see themselves, they will love themselves.) We are preaching virtue again, but by that to mean NOW, what seems the most constructive uses of the world.

The Revolutionary Theatre must EXPOSE! Show up the insides of

anyone names except common Sense. The Revolutionary Theatre should flush the fags and murders out of Lincoln's face.

It should stagger through our universe correcting, insulting, preaching, spitting craziness . . . but a craziness taught to us in our most rational moments. People must be taught to trust true scientists (knowers, diggers, oddballs) and that the holiness of life is the constant possibility of widening the consciousness. And they must be incited to strike back against *any*

Poet-playwright LeRoi Jones founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in Harlem (pictured on the opposite page) in an effort to pursue the objectives outlined in this essay.



these humans, look into black skulls. White men will cower before this theatre because it hates them. Because they have been trained to hate. The Revolutionary Theatre must hate them for hating. For presuming with their technology to deny the supremacy of the Spirit. They will all die because of this.

The Revolutionary Theatre must teach them their deaths. It must crack their faces open to the mad cries of the poor. It must teach them about silence and the truths lodged there. It must kill any God

agency that attempts to prevent this widening.

The Revolutionary Theatre must Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked. It must Accuse and Attack because it is a theatre of Victims. It looks at the sky with the victims' eyes, and moves the victims to look at the strength in their minds and their bodies.

Clay, in *Dutchman*, Ray, in *The Toilet*, Walker in *The Slave* are all victims. In the Western sense they could be heroes. But the Revolutionary Theatre, even if it is West-

ern, must be anti-Western. It must show horrible coming attractions of The Crumbling of The West. Even as Artaud designed The Conquest of Mexico, so we must design The Conquest of White Eye, and show the missionaries and wiggly Liberals dying under blasts of concrete. For sound effects, wild screams of joy, from all the peoples of the world.

The Revolutionary Theatre must take dreams and give them a reality. It must isolate the ritual and historical cycles of reality. But it must be food for all these who need food, and daring propaganda for the beauty of the Human Mind. But it is a political theatre, a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dimwitted fat-bellied white guys who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on.

This should be a theatre of World Spirit. Where the spirit can be shown to be the most competent force in the world. Force. Spirit. Feeling. The language will be anybody's, but tightened by the poet's backbone. And even the language must show what the facts are in this consciousness epic, what's happening. We will talk about the world, and the preciseness with which we are able to summon the world, will be our art. Art is method. And art, "like any ashtray or senator," remains in the world. Wittgenstein said ethics and aesthetics are one. I believe this. So the Broadway theatre is a theatre of reaction whose ethics, like its aesthetics, reflects the spir-

itual values of this unholy society, which sends young crackers all over the world blowing off colored peoples heads. (In some of these flip-py southern towns they even shoot up the immigrants' Favorite Son, be it Michael Schwerner or J. F. Kennedy.)

The Revolutionary Theatre is shaped by the world, and moves to reshape the world, using as its force the natural force and perpetual vibrations of the mind in the world. We are history and desire, what we are, and what any experience can make us.

It is a social theatre, but all theatre is social theatre. But we will change the drawing rooms into places where real things can be said about a real world, or into smoky rooms where the destruction of Washington can be plotted. The Revolutionary Theatre must function like an incendiary pencil planted in Curtis Lemay's cap. So that when the final curtain goes down brains are splattered over the seats and the floor, and bleeding nuns must wire SOS's to Belgians with gold teeth.

Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, and that they themselves are victims, if they are blood brothers. And what we show must cause the blood to rush, so that pre-revolutionary temperaments will be bathed in this blood, and it will cause their deepest souls to move, and they find themselves tensed

and clenched, even ready to die, at what the soul has been taught. We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be. We are preaching virtue and feeling, and a natural sense of the self in the world. All men live in the world, and the world ought to be a place for them to live.

What is called the imagination (from image, magi, magic, magician, etc.) is a practical vector from the soul. It stores all data, and can be called on to solve all our "problems." The imagination is the projection of ourselves past our sense of ourselves as "things." Imagination (image) is all possibility, because from the image, the initial circumscribed energy, and use (idea) is possible. And so begins that image's use in the world. Possibility is what moves us.

The popular white man's theatre like the popular white man's novel shows tired white lives, and the problems of eating white sugar, or else it herds bigcaboose blondes onto huge stages in rhinestones and makes believe they are dancing or singing. *WHITE BUSINESSMEN OF THE WORLD, DO YOU WANT TO SEE PEOPLE REALLY DANCING AND SINGING? ALL OF YOU GO UP IN HARLEM AND GET YOURSELF KILLED. THERE WILL BE DANCING AND SINGING, THEN, FOR REAL!* (In *The Slave*, Walker Vessels, the black

revolutionary, wears an armband, which is the insignia of the attacking army . . . a big redlipped minstrel, grinning like crazy.)

The liberal white man's objection to the theatre of the revolution (if he is "hip" enough) will be on aesthetic grounds. Most white Western artists do not need to be "political," since usually, whether they know it or not, they are in complete sympathy with the most repressive social forces in the world today. There are more junior birdmen fascists running around the West today disguised as Artists than there are disguised as fascists. (But then, that word, Fascist, and with it, Fascism, has been made obsolete by the word America, and Americanism. The American Artist usually turns out to be just a super-Bourgeois, because, finally, all he has to show for his sojourn through the world is "better taste" than the Bourgeois . . . many times not even that.)

Americans will hate the revolutionary theatre because it will be out to destroy them and whatever they believe is real. American cops will try to close the theatres where such nakedness of the human spirit is paraded. American producers will say the revolutionary plays are filth, usually because they will treat human life as if it was actually happening. American directors will say that the white guys in the plays are too abstract and cowardly ("don't get me wrong . . . I mean aesthetically . . .") and they will be right.

The force we want is of 20 million spooks storming America with furious cries and unstoppable weapons. We want actual explosions and actual brutality; *AN EPOCH IS CRUMBLING* and we must give it the space and hugeness of its actual demise. The Revolutionary Theatre, which is now peopled with victims, will soon begin to be peopled with new kinds of heroes . . . not the weak Hamlets debating whether or not they are ready to die for what's on their minds, but men and women (and minds) digging out from under a thousand years of "high art" and

weakfaced dalliance. We must make an art that will function as to call down the actual wrath of world spirit. We are witchdoctors, and assassins, but we will open a place for the true scientists to expand our consciousness. This is a theatre of assault. The play that will split the heavens for us will be called *The Destruction of America*. The heroes will be Crazy Horse, Denmark Vesey, Patrice Lumumba, but not history, not memory, not sad sentimental groping for a warmth in our despair; these will be new men, new heroes, and their enemies most of you who are reading this.

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Jitterbugs

The imperfection of the world
is a burden, if you know it, think
about it, at all. Look up in the sky
wishing you were free, placed so terribly
in time, mind out among new stars, working
propositions, and not this planet where you
cant go anywhere without awareness of the hurt
the white man has put on the people. Any people. You
cant escape, there's no where to go. They have made
this star unsafe, and this age, primitive, though yr mind
is somewhere else, your ass aint.

—LEROI JONES

Humor in Hue

By Morrie

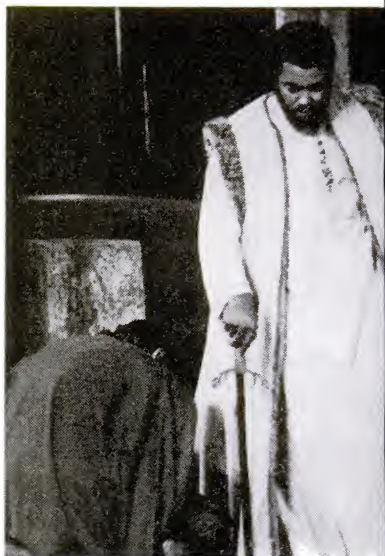


"We were worried about visiting Scotland, but we found out the word clan has a different connotation there"

YO A ON WAY U

BY ROBERT BURG

"Jones definitely wants parts that are meant to be played by Negroes only. He has set up an inflexible condition that an audience must recognize him for what he is—a black man"



ALMOST everyone in the western hemisphere has heard of Sir Laurence Olivier, the great English actor who has starred in the theater and on motion picture screens. But who, pray tell, is James Earl Jones?

The two names—one so famous, the other practically unknown—came into juxtaposition last year when *Life* Magazine ran a review of an Off-Broadway production of *Othello* which featured Jones in the title role. Coincidentally, Sir

Laurence was (and at this writing still is) playing the same part in a British revival of the ancient play. *Life's* reviewer compared the acting styles of the two men and concluded that Jones more than held his own with his completely individual, completely absorbing portrayal of the Moor of Venice.

In one respect, at least, Sir Laurence was laboring under a handicap which several earlier critics had pointed out: being white, he had to resort to some rather eye-stopping (and, from the critics'

James Earl Jones



point of view, distracting) black-face make-up to more properly assume the role of Othello, who was a Negro. Jones had no such problem—he *is* a Negro.

James Earl Jones is 34 years old, is a little on the heavy side (although he's tall, which compensates for this), and has what many theatergoers and reviewers acknowledge to be a most incredibly striking face, one that is massive and almost biblical in appearance because of the thick, bushy beard that curves around it. Thick black

eyebrows top off this imposing combination of facial features and lend to Jones an air of intensity that is just right for the Moor of Venice. He is a bachelor who lives in a messy two-room flat in New York's Lower East Side, and his one interest appears to be acting. Indeed, this young man seems to eat, sleep and live acting and it is possible, just possible, that someday his name may be as well-known as Sir Laurence Olivier.

At the present, however, Jones is just one of several dozen very

talented actors who are little-known in the New York theater world, bobbing about in low-budget productions and waiting to be noticed by top producers. Unlike his struggling colleagues, though, Jones is more than satisfied to be where he is at this particular point in time. In a profession famous for its "stars," this is one man who is seriously pursuing his career by acting and studying, and who professes that he is totally uninterested in the tinsel glamour that accompanies the Hollywood brand of stardom.

A glance at his theatrical record reveals the deliberateness and purpose that mark his budding career; he has had a string of roles which, taken together, comprise a fine apprenticeship in the theater. He has run the gamut from comic roles such as the whimsical cannibal hired to eat the hero's mother-in-law in *The Love Nest*, to more serious portrayals such as the dignified Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* and the older brother in *The Cool World*, which played briefly on Broadway before being made into a film. Yet, despite these and many other parts, Jones is in no hurry to "make a name" for himself. Each week he takes the subway to the Actors Studio to sit in as an observer on study and criticism sessions, and on Monday, his day off from the theater, he is usually in the audience of current plays, looking, analyzing, and even enjoying.

Despite all of this activity and

experience, this tall, handsome actor still must face the obvious question of just how far a serious, dedicated Negro can go in the American theater. Below the "star" level of people like Sidney Poitier and Lena Horne and Sammy Davis, Jr., there are dozens, perhaps even a few hundred Negroes in show business who exist in a large gray area where nothing ever seems to happen beyond a hardly noticeable role in an occasional play or film. Is it possible to break out of this area to bigger and better parts?

Jones refuses, however, to view the theater strictly from the viewpoint of being a Negro. "Opportunities for actors in general could be better," he says—and means it.

This is not to say that Jones is completely unaware of the color of his skin. Far from it. There are always little incidents that serve to remind him that he is a Negro. A few years ago, for example, he was playing the part of the bombardier in the motion picture, *Dr. Strangelove*. In the tense, climactic scene in which the American plane is rocked by a Soviet Missile, Jones was being carefully instructed by the director, Stanley Kubrick. Kubrick told him to look upward in fright at the moment of the explosion. "With the camera very low looking up at me," Jones recalls, "I thought to myself, 'Sonofabitch, this guy wants me to roll my eyes.' If it wasn't Kubrick, I would've said, 'Are you trying to get a Stepin Fetchit effect or something?'" Actu-

ally, I think he almost wanted that effect. He wanted simply to suggest it, to awaken in the observer's mind the particular image of the Negro in trouble."

An even more subtle complication of his being a Negro as it relates to the theater is that Jones's skin is of a medium shade and his nose is slim and conservative in appearance. Thus, when he comes on stage, the audience—while naturally recognizing him as a Negro—may find itself more readily able to identify with him than with a darker-skinned actor. The writer of a play in which he was understudy to the lead once approached him and told him, "Jimmy, I think that if you were out there the audience might identify better with the character." The actor in the lead, naturally, was several shades darker than Jones.

While he may have his sensitivities about being Negro, there is no question that Jones is proud of what he is. "I don't want to go on stage and eliminate my negritude," he says flatly. "I think there's something so exciting about being what you are, whether it's being seven feet tall or black or blonde, that you shouldn't want to disguise it or pretend it isn't there."

Many white liberals who have applauded the recent trend toward casting Negroes in parts that would normally go to white actors or actresses (such as Ruby Dee playing Cordelia in *King Lear*) will be drawn up short by Jones's attitude toward this development. He does

not want to be so "integrated" into a play as to lose his identity as a Negro. Jones definitely wants parts that are meant to be played by Negroes only. He has set up an inflexible condition that an audience must recognize him for what he is—a black man. And then it must accept him this way. He is interested in exploring and developing his blackness and in using it unashamedly in the theater. "I've always wanted to play Mephistopholes and emphasize all of his black aspects," he says.

For all of these conditions and demands on an audience, Jones is resigned—at least for the present—to the fact that it takes theatergoers a few minutes to get used to him as a Negro before it can accept him as a character in the play. "They never really identify," he says. "But they come much closer to it the deeper into the character I get as an actor. I found that people cry watching Othello in the moment of his agony, and at that moment they necessarily have to forget what he is. Even Bull Connor would cry watching Othello, in spite of himself. It's that deep psychic defense that people have that's a hard thing to crack. It keeps them from accepting Negroes in certain capacities."

To illustrate what he means, Jones summons up the story of the time he was sitting in a movie theater watching a newsreel about the Korean War. When a scene flashed on the screen showing American soldiers, both white and

black, in action together, a woman sitting nearby Jones suddenly jumped up and said in very shocked tones to her companion, "They don't have Negroes in the front lines!"

One need go no further than the television set to see this kind of mentality in action, Jones believes. He points out that TV commercials are a field that is now opening up to Negro actors—if they are the right shade. "They're trying to do token integration," he asserts. "Take a soap commercial. Let's say it's important for the producers to show a Negro woman using Smith's Soapflakes. Well, it's almost as important not to have her so specifically Negro that anyone couldn't identify with her. You recognize the shade and that's the token."

As a Negro in a profession that makes strenuous physical and mental demands on those who pursue it, Jones has more than once been confronted with the conflict of making a choice of which comes first—civil rights or art. Occasionally he is able to successfully combine one with the other, as when he participated in a taped television program about the three civil rights workers who were murdered in Mississippi not long ago. It was during this taping that he was confronted with yet another manifestation of the same basic dilemma. One of the men in the television studio who had been working with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee approached him

and tried to talk him into going into the South and working for civil rights there. Jones reluctantly turned him down.

"I think if I went down there," he says, "I would have to devote myself to it totally, and if I did that I don't think I would take the choice that James Foreman or Martin Luther King takes. I think I would take the choice of Malcolm X to cope with that situation. There is need for that kind of pressure rather than the moral pressure, because morality is long gone. The more militant black leaders who say that the solution is economics in the North and force in the South are right. I mean for now. Maybe some day morality will be the solution. I don't know."

The curious thing about Jones is that even while he is talking about the oppression of Negroes in America, there is no bitterness in his voice. It is as if he were talking about oppressors he has heard about but never met. Almost in the same breath he will say, "I don't know what Christ was talking about, but he was onto something." His conviction that Malcolm X had the right approach to the race conflict may even be somewhat explained by his interest in the assassinated black nationalist as a dramatic character. "I'd like to perform Malcolm X," he says. "I'd like to explore with an audience and a director and other actors that phenomenon that was called Malcolm X."

This last statement isn't surpris-

ing when you understand that Jones looks on the theater as a pressure chamber, where invisible forces froth and boil over. Indeed, it is possible that for him, as for other dedicated actors, an understanding of life is acquired on the stage in that electric moment when there is that unity of spirit and concentration between actor and audience, in that moment when the spark of life leaps from a script. Jones says that he cannot go onto the stage to pretend to be someone he's not. At the same time, he may often go before an audience and discover in the character something of himself which, until that moment, lay below the threshold of his awareness.

Apart from these abstractions of exploration and discovery, Jones is concerned with the more down-to-earth techniques and tools of his profession. He is a hard worker; for his role in *Othello* he steeped himself in the maze of theories hypothesized by Shakespearian scholars to explain the personality of the dark-skinned general.

Jones has learned that an actor's concentration can be one of his most useful tools. "Gene Frankel [a New York director and drama teacher] taught me that," he says. "Concentration on what you're doing on stage, on your part, is largely responsible for involving your audience. You can even be

doing bad work, but if your concentration is strong enough, they'll watch your bad work rather than their dates or the people in the next row. I can sense their involvement when my own involvement in the part is strong enough. If I'm too busy watching to see if I've got them, I don't get them. It's like Zen. It's a yoga of acting: you do it and then you know it. It's a matter of total commitment."

Along with these techniques, Jones has also developed a philosophical attitude toward assessing the value of his own work which other actors might envy. "There are neither successes nor failures," he says. "I think I've committed myself as best I could to everything I've done. If an artist looks at himself objectively, he won't see himself in terms of 'success' or 'failure.' That's usually for somebody else's judgment."

Jones's ambition is to be a great actor, that is, to be able to play a particular role better than anyone else who had the same kind of talents and skills.

In an off-moment once, Jones admitted, "My life is sort of funny in a way. I go around as if the sky could fall in on me at any moment—although so far it hasn't."

Lately he hasn't had much chance to check the sky. He's too busy making a living in the theater.

Robert Burg is a 26-year-old New York free-lance writer.

Some Reflections On The Negro Actress

THE TATTERED QUEENS

BY RUBY DEE

"I maintain that we actresses must concern ourselves more with the fate of each other and of the younger actresses coming along, by helping to find material and getting it produced, by promoting scholarships for intensive training"

WHEN I first learned about the death of Dorothy Dandridge, a tremendous sadness came over me. I'd known her slightly only, really—over the years; our paths had never crossed in work—occasionally socially; but I had seen her, mostly as an actress and remembered with

joy her beautiful performance as Carmen in the movie, *Carmen Jones*. I felt I knew her as well as I knew myself . . . What, as a young performer, she aspired to, what she had to settle for—the active search for opportunities, the sporadic success, the long periods of nothing to look forward to, the deliberate pretense of indifference,



DIANA SANDS



DIAHANN CARROLL

the deep self-doubt; a major role—then waiting, waiting . . .

She was lucky, for her career as an actress began with a head start as a singer, and between the betweens, she could fill club dates. (How fortunate not to be “Just an actress.”)

I wondered if the tragedy of Dorothy was not indeed the tragedy of all Negro actresses.

I worked with an actress once in a huge theatre in the Bronx, in a play—*Arsenic and Old Lace*. I had vaguely known of her. “What style she had,” I recall thinking, “what grace.” I wondered where she had been trained. There was something about her personality—distinctly royal, profoundly human. She might have played any role from a queen to a peasant, representing any race or country. Her name was Abbie Mitchell. She had worked with some of the leading talents of the early 1900’s, she had been ac-



CICELY TYSON

claimed here, but mostly in Europe, an extraordinary soprano, a *prima donna*. I felt fortunate that our lives had touched. At the time of our meeting I was quite young and coming along well “for a colored girl” at the time. I believe that often young performers lacking a continuity of experience, lacking a



ABBIE MITCHELL



HILDA SIMMS

knowledge of history of entertainment, of the tradition and great contribution that our people have made to the theatre, may tend to feel that a whole new world begins with each newcomer. Not so.

Inspired by Abbie Mitchell, I began to read books about and by Negro performers. I am deeply grateful to such people as James Weldon Johnson, Tom Fletcher, and Edith Isaacs for having written on the subject. It was through their books that I began to feel a sense of belonging somewhere as an actress . . . as part of a tradition. I'd almost missed knowing Abbie Mitchell. Where was her scrapbook? Where was there a more complete description of her life? Couldn't my husband, Ossie Davis, write her story as a play? Why didn't I talk to her more, ask her what it is like to reach the top? Is there a top for Negro actresses? Why wasn't she as well known and as frequently employed as the leading white performers of the time? Retired? Why? What would she play next? It was some years later by then. After talking about her, after asking other older performers who "came out of retirement", about her, I finally wrote her asking for an appointment. The letter came back unanswered, unopened. It was marked, "Deceased."

Rose McClendon and the famous walk down those stairs, (even Ethel Barrymore complimented her for it, with kindness that comes only from being white, regularly employed, and nationally recog-

nized), who was she? Had she worked in more than the half a dozen plays I'd seen referred to? Where was there a record of her accomplishments? I remember tall, sensitive, Edna Thomas. Why don't I see her on television sometimes—or Broadway—on or off? Retired now, perhaps; but because she wants to be?

It seems that Negro actresses enjoyed a fuller creative life in the old community theatre: e.g. the all-Negro Lafayette Players. Such actresses as Edna Thomas, Hilda Offley, Evelyn Ellis, and Laura Bowman knew and benefitted from working in stock companies. They had a chance to more fully explore the depths of their talent. They were not primarily restricted to plays about Negroes. One may be extremely talented, *but only constant exposure makes a performer stage-worthy and camera-worthy*. I never heard of a Negro starlet with a seven year contract, learning the ropes in B movies and studio schools. Quite a few moderately talented white actresses have blossomed into fame and fortune under such attention. What might have happened to Dorothy Dandridge with a seven-year contract? And the security that goes with it?

We actresses are so accustomed to the fact that performers such as Ethel Waters, Lena Horne, Beah Richards, Pauline Myers, Jane White, Hilda Simms, and Claudia McNeil have no part in television, or work regularly in stock, that we stop trying. We hear talk of inte-

gration and things getting better, and indeed there are some marvelous integrated commercials, and more Negro actors appearing in incidental parts, and every now and then racially mixed leads, and an occasional all-Negro show, but these are isolated instances, not a trend indicating that things may be somewhat better in an individual sense. Group participation in the creative life of the country is less than ever.

We cannot grow in isolation. The Negro actress is still acting on the fringes, not really a part, only occasionally let in, better off portraying the prostitute, the second—roles written with not enough imagination and truth. We can point to no one of us who has the remotest chance of reaching the prominence of Helen Hayes, Ethel Barrymore, Bette Davis, etc. No one with that kind of economic opportunity either. We dream, we scream, we pretend, we picket. Or like some other of our most gifted—Mildred Joan Smith, Muriel Smith, Marion Douglas—we quit. Will the newer names on the horizon—like Cicely Tyson and Diana Sands and Gloria Foster—escape the paucity of opportunity that always seems to follow occasional spurts of comparative good fortune for “colored stars?”

When we talk or write about ourselves and our place in American society so much is necessarily a lament. But perhaps a look at stark reality may help clarify and make objective our grievances,

indicate alternatives to despair through some program of action. I fully realize the cultural poverty that is abroad in the land. Leading white actresses are afflicted by some of the same ills that affect the Negro actress. (Their lowest level of employment is, however, often commensurate with our highest.) There are many more parts written for men than women, white and black. But my concern here is with the Negro actress, who faces double discrimination—that of sex and that of race. What must we do—

we Negro actresses to be saved?

We must, most certainly, make a determined effort to encourage our playwrights—particularly female—to write for all media. There is a kind of autocracy about an entertainer—each one sort of spinning around in a personal orbit, on individual momentum. I maintain that we actresses must concern ourselves more with the fate of each other, and of the younger actresses coming along, by helping to find material and getting it produced, by promoting scholarships for intensive training. We must also see to it that the new theatres springing up over the country include Negro actors as basic and intrinsic parts of their companies. Indeed, the future of the theatre may lie in repertory companies, and on the road.

In the past, musicians—singers and instrumentalists—fared better in relation to their art than we have. They have been for the most part innovators and pace-setters. (Top

money and opportunity, however, still go to their white imitators). Innovators in song, dance, and language. Theirs is a development springing from the soul roots of our people. But that same "soul roots" truth of the lives of our people has yet to be explored in drama. We know best on stage and screen the prostitute. The Negro Maid, (as a person rather than a stereotype), the Negro Mother, the Average Woman, and the Middle-Class Woman have for the most part yet to be dealt with in depth.

This holds true of the heroines of our history also. We must ask our playwrights to do better by us. We do have, as a people, an address to life, a cry, a joy, that is particularly ours, that has yet to be fully and unselfconsciously put forward. Women must become producers—pioneering and prospecting among our own for backing. (I am particularly gratified at the work done in this connection by Maria Cole and Juanita Poitier.) We must see to it that our young people consider the very important backstage and off-camera roles as technicians. More people see films than ever go to the theatre. If one of the purposes of art is to effect change, we must make every effort to become proficient in every phase of film making, working for inclusion in American films at every possible level. The reality is that we are but 10 per cent of a population which is geared to segregate and to discriminate—improving, I believe, but desperately in need of artistic

effort to help change the image of the Negro and so effect social change more quickly. As art not only reflects life but also influences it, we must dedicate ourselves to the improvement of life and its truths—about women, about Negroes.

The Negro actress cannot afford to be isolated from this effort. We must not evade the fact that in today's America most Negro "stars" are at best tattered queens, haunted always by an aura of tragedy, failure, and defeat. But we must not be defeated. With a sober look at what is happening with us today, we must make every effort to make things better for those who will come after us.

And I would especially encourage those young women of my race most likely to be overlooked—the very black, the very Africanesque—to study and to work. I believe they have shied away from theatre because their particular kind of beauty has not only not been encouraged, but has been heretofore too often rejected. But how else can a people know its own beauty except that those artists most representative of it come forth and tell it? The fair-skinned, those nearer to Caucasian in appearance and manners, have always fared better in our theatre. But are we not, basically, of African descent? In the better times to come, there will be equal place on our stage and screens for all shades, all types, all colors. We must see to it that this is so.

*From The Heart of the
'American Confusion'*

THEATRE: THE NEGRO IN AND OUT

BY JAMES BALDWIN

"Much of the American confusion, if not most of it, is a direct result of the American effort to avoid dealing with the Negro as a man. The theatre cannot fail to reflect this confusion . . ."

IT IS a sad fact that I have rarely seen a Negro actor really well used on the American stage or screen, or on television. I am not trying to start an artificial controversy when I say this, for in fact most American performers seem to find themselves trapped very soon in an "iron maiden" of mannerisms.

Somehow, the achieved record falls below the promise. Henry Fonda, for example, is one of the most accomplished actors around, but I find it very difficult to watch him because most of the roles he



plays do not seem to me to be worth doing.

Moreover, it would seem to me that his *impulse* as an actor is very truthful; but the roles he plays are not. His physical attributes, and his quality of painful, halting honesty are usually at the mercy of some mediocre playwright's effort to justify the bankruptcy of the American male, e.g., the *nebbish* with whom he so gallantly struggles in *Two For The Seesaw*.

The point is that one can attend the Broadway theatre, and most of the Off-Broadway theatre all season long without ever being moved, or terrified, or engaged.

The spectacle on the stage does not attempt to recreate our experience—thus helping us to deal with it. The attempt is almost always in the opposite direction: to justify our fantasies, thus locking us within them.

Now, the figure of the Negro is at the very heart of the American confusion. Much of the American confusion, if not most of it, is a direct result of the American effort to avoid dealing with the Negro as a man. The theatre cannot fail to reflect this confusion, with results which are unhealthy for the white actor, and disastrous for the Negro.

The character a white actor is called on to play is usually a wishful fantasy: the person, not as he is, but as he would like to see himself. It need scarcely be said, therefore, that the situations the playwright invents for this person have as their principal intention the support of this fantasy.

The Caine Mutiny Court Martial, A Majority of One, Tea and Sympathy, and Tall Story, are all utterly untruthful plays. The entire purpose of the prodigies of engineering skill expanded on them is to make the false seem true. And this cannot fail, finally, to have a terrible effect on the actor's art, for the depths out of which true inspiration springs are precisely the depths he is forbidden to reach.

I am convinced that this is one of the reasons for the nerve wracking *busyness* of our stage—"Keep moving, maybe nobody will notice that nothing's happening,"—and the irritating, self indulgent mannerisms of so many of our actors. In search of a truth which is not in the script, they are reduced to what seem to be psychotherapeutic exercises.

Listening to actors talk about the means they employ to "justify" this line, or that action, is enough to break the heart and set the teeth on edge. Sometimes the actor finds that no amount of skill will "justify" or cover up the hollowness or falsity of what he is called on to do. This is where the director comes in: it would seem that much of his skill involves keeping everything moving at such a clip, and to have so many things happening at once, that the audience will remain, in effect, safely protected from the play.

If this is true for the white actor, it is unimaginably worse for the Negro actor. The characters played by white actors, however untruthful they may essentially be, do depend—on the accumulation of small, very carefully observed detail. Thus, Chester Morris, playing a thoroughly unreal father, in *Blue Denim*, yet mimics the type so well that it is easy to be misled into believing that you once knew someone like him. But the characters played by Negro actors do not have even this advantage. White people do not know enough about Negro life to know which details to look for, or how to interpret such details as may have been forced on their attention.

To take one of the many possible examples: the scene in Reginald Rose's *Black Monday*, in which Juano Hernandez is beaten to death. Hernandez plays a janitor in the Deep South, you will remember, who is opposed to inte-

gration. He does not believe—so he informs a marvelously mocking and salty Hilda Simms—in pushing himself in “where he is not wanted.” He is also telling this to his twelve year old grandson, who is beginning (somewhat improbably) to wonder if he is as good as white people.

Now, of course, we have all met such janitors and such Negroes. But their tone is very different and their tone betrays what they really feel. However servile they may appear to be, there is always a murderous rage, or a murderous fear, or both, not quite sleeping at the very bottom of their hearts and minds. The truth is that they do not have any real respect for white people: they despise them and they fear them. They certainly do not trust them. And when such a man confronts his nephew or his grandson, no matter what he says, there cannot fail to be brought alive in him envy and terror and love and hate. He has always hated his condition, even though he feared to change it, even though he may no longer be able to admit it.

If the playwright does not know this, as, on the evidence, I gather Mr. Rose did not, he cannot draw the character truthfully and the actor who plays him is seriously handicapped.

This shows very painfully in the scene in which Hernandez meets his death. His reaction to the effigy of a hanged Negro, in spite of all Mr. Hernandez's skill, is false. This is not the first time he has seen

such an effigy, and if he has been living in that town all his life, it is simply not possible for the white people there to surprise him—at least, they cannot surprise him by being wicked or by being afraid. They have always been that, and he knows that about them, if he knows nothing else. Any Negro, facing, in such a town, three overheated white boys, knows what he is in for.

He can try to outwit, flatter, cajole them, put them at their ease by humiliating himself—though at this point, the spectacle of his humiliation is probably not enough to set them at their ease; or if the chips are really, at last, thank heaven, down, he can resolve to take one of them with him. And even if all the foregoing guesswork is wrong, one thing remains indisputable: once attacked, he would certainly not be trying to get past his attackers in order to go to work. Not on that morning, not in that school, not with death staring at him out of the eyes of three young white men.

All of the training, therefore, all of the skill which Mr. Hernandez has acquired, to say nothing of his talent—for it took a vast amount of talent to bring Lucas, in *Intruder In The Dust* alive—is here not merely wasted, which would be bad enough; it is subverted, sabotaged, put at the mercy of a lie; for the well-spring on which the actor must draw, which is his own sense of life, and his own experience, is precisely, here, what Mr. Hernandez can-

not use. If he had, it would have torn the scene to pieces, and altered the course of the play. For the play's real intention, after all, is to say something about the integration struggle without saying anything about the root of it.

If you will examine the play carefully, you will find that the only really wicked people in the play are wicked because they are insane. They are covered, therefore, and the crimes of the republic are hidden. If we get rid of all these mad people, the play seems to be saying, "We'll get together and everything will be all right." The realities of economics, sex, politics, and history are thus swept under the rug.



Now the Negro actor, after all, is also a person and was not born two seconds before he enters the casting office. By the time he gets to that office, he has probably been an elevator boy, a cab driver, a dishwasher, a porter, a longshoreman. His blood is already thick with humiliations, and if he has any sense at all, he knows how small are his chances of making it in the theatre. He does a great deal of acting in the casting office, more, probably, than he will ever be allowed to do onstage. And, whatever his training, he is not there to get a role he really wants to play: he is there to get a role which will allow him to be seen.

It is all too likely that he has seen

actors inferior to himself in training and talent rise far above him. And now, here he is, once more, facing an essentially ignorant and uncaring white man or woman, who *may* allow him to play a butler or a maid in the show being cast. He dissembles his experience in the office, and he knows that he will probably be lying about it onstage. He also knows why; it is because nobody wants to know the story. It would upset them. To begin analyzing all of his probable reactions, would take all of the space of this magazine, and then some. But resentment is compounded by the fact, as a Negro actress once observed to me, that not only does the white world impose the most intolerable conditions on Negro life, they also presume to dictate the mode, manner, terms, and style of one's reaction against these conditions.

Or, as a Negro playwright tells it, explaining how Ketti Frings came to adapt Richard Wright's *Long Dream* for the stage: "She was sitting by this swimming pool, see, and reading this book, and she thought, 'This would make a perfectly *darling* play.'"

"So she wrote the first few scenes and called out her Negro butler, chauffeur, and maid, and read it to them and asked, 'Now, isn't that the way you poor, downtrodden, colored people feel about things?' 'Why, yes, Miss Frings,' they answered: and, I thought, so, says the playwright"—and so we go on. And on and on.

The point . . . is that the theatre is perishing for the lack of vitality. Vitality, humanly and artistically speaking, has only one source, and that source is life. Now, the life actually being led on this continent is not the life which we pretend it is. White men are not what they take themselves to be, and Negroes are very different—to say the very least—from the popular image of them.

This image must be cracked, not only if we are to achieve a theatre—for we do not really have a theatre now, only a series of commercial speculations which result in mammoth musicals, and “daring” plays like *Compulsion* and *Inherit the Wind*, which are about as daring as a spayed tomcat—this image must be cracked if we intend to survive as a nation. The Negro-in-America is increasingly the central problem in American life, and not merely in social terms, in personal terms as well.

I intend, from time to time, in discussing the theatre, to return to this point, for I think the time has come to begin a bloodless revolution. Only by a more truthful examination of what is really happening here can we realize the real aims of the theatre which are to instruct through terror and pity and delight and love. The only thing we can now do for the “tired business man” is to scare the living day-lights out of him.

Both the Albee plays at the York Theatre—*The Death of Bessie Smith* and *The American Dream*—left me rather waiting for the other shoe to fall. Both plays seemed to promise more than they delivered; but I am not at all certain that I know what it is that they promised. This is not, by the way, meant as a complaint or as a joke. I don't mind—in the theatre, at any rate—having my cozy expectations swept out from under me; and I'm the type that enjoys being forced to ask myself just what the author had in mind. I was hardly ever moved “to the heart,” as we say, by either of the Albee plays, but I was mystified, enraged, amused and horrified. I don't know if you will like them or not, but I think you ought to see them.

To take the plays in the order in which they were presented: *The Death of Bessie Smith* takes place in the Deep South, much of it in a thoroughly demoralizing hospital. There is not a single attractive person in this play, unless one excepts the off-stage Bessie Smith, and the good-natured but simple-minded type who takes her on the journey which ends in her death.

Neither Bessie nor this man have much to do with the main action of the play. There is a question in my mind as to whether they really do much to illuminate it, but we will discuss this in a moment. In the course of the play, Bessie Smith dies off-stage and this is the extent, on the surface, anyway, of her

connection with this drama.

The play's principal concern—I *think*—is with the character of a white Southern nurse. Character is perhaps not quite the word I want; rarely has less character been presented at greater or more unsympathetic length. I hesitate, possibly because I am a coward, to suppose this creature is intended, in any way, to represent the fair ladies of the South. And yet, she is clearly of no interest in herself, except clinically; and I must add that, as I watched her, my own memories of Southern faces came flooding back, bringing with them the near-certainty that this horror, this emptiness, might very well be what the Southern face—and particularly the faces of the women—hide. I imagine that anyone who is old enough will not fail to be reminded of the faces and the personalities of the women who accused the Scottsboro boys of rape.

We first encounter this woman with her father—and they deserve each other—on the porch of their home. She is icily and methodically, and not for the first time—they certainly have nothing else to talk about—puncturing his delusions as to his person, his political ambitions, and his friendship with the mayor, who is a patient in the hospital where she works on the admissions desk.

The relationship between the father and daughter is absolutely unspeakable, as are almost all the other relationships in this play; but

I was puzzled as to what, precisely, Mr. Albee wished me to make of it. It is a relationship which, like the character of the nurse, is really of no interest in itself, it being doomed, by the lack of resources in the people, to be static. They will have this conversation over and over, then they will die, or the curtain will fall: and what either we or they have learned in the meantime is a question.

It may be that Mr. Albee's intention was to reveal, as forcefully as possible, the depth of the Southern poverty and paranoia, and the extent of the sexual ruin. But if this is so, then I think he has miscalculated.



I sympathize with him in the dilemma to which his raw material, his personages, have drawn him. I am an American writer, too, and I know how it sets the teeth on edge to try to create, out of people clearly incapable of it—incapable of self-examination, of thought, or literally, of speech—drama that will reveal them. But the solution is not, to my mind, to present these people as they see themselves or *as they are*; we must be enabled to see them as they have been or as they might become; otherwise, we merely judge them as specimens and feel nothing for them as human beings.

It has, perhaps, never been more difficult than it is now to illuminate the person beleaguered and bewildered by the irresponsibility and provincialism and worship of mediocrity which he, in his innocence, mistakes for democracy. On the other hand, it has possibly never been more important. So that I do not object to the deadly, hysterical stasis of the nurse, but to the fact that Mr. Albee never forces me to identify her inhumanity, her poverty, her terror, with my own.

For, in essence, the passionless brimstone exchanges which open the play *are* the play: the tone never changes, and we never learn very much more about the nurse, or the other people in the play, or about the community in which the action takes place. There is an arresting sequence between the nurse and a Negro orderly; but I must confess that the intention here was hopelessly muddled for me by the casting—I could not tell, at once, whether Harold Scott was playing a white man or a light Negro; and when it was clear that he was playing a Negro, I found myself distracted by the question of whether any Negro in the Deep South would so expose himself to this white witch. I did not know what to make of the interne, a dull type at best, it seemed to me; and whatever sympathy I might have been expected to feel for him was demolished by his incomprehensible passion to take the nurse to bed. (Whatever for?) This leaves, I believe, only the brief appearance of

another, wonderfully distracted nurse, the off-stage Bessie, and her last paramour.

And here, again, either I have totally misunderstood Mr. Albee's intention, or he has miscalculated. I expected, at some point in the play, some ruthless flash which would illuminate the contrast between the wonderfully reckless life and terrible death of Bessie Smith and the whited sepulchre in which the nurse is writhing. But this does not happen. Bessie Smith bleeds to death, the nurse is the only character who knows who she is—earlier, her father had protested her addiction to 'nigger' music—and the nurse succumbs to hysteria. She announces that she, too, can sing and, horribly, tries.

I think I understand Mr. Albee's intention here, all right, but I think it fails of its effect: because there is no agony in it. People pay for the lives they lead and the crimes they commit and the blood-guiltiness from which they flee, whether they know they do or not. The effort not to know what one knows is the most corrupting effort one can make—which the nurse abundantly proves. But the anguish which comes when the buried knowledge begins to force itself to the light—which *must* be what is happening to the nurse upon the death of Bessie Smith—has driven countless thousands to madness or murder or grace, but certainly far beyond hysteria.

The American Dream turns out to be the gelded youth, so admired

here and now. It presents a much more bland and amusing surface, but can scarcely qualify, obviously, as a funny play. Its vision of the antiseptic passivity of American life, and the resulting death of the masculine sensibility, makes it more closely resemble a nightmare. I cannot synopsise this play, which offers even less in the way of story (and even more in the way of incident) than *Bessie Smith*. It begins at a marvelous clip, making its deadly observations with a salty, impertinent speed. ("I've got a right to all your money when you die," says Mommy to Daddy, "because I used to let you lie on top of me and bump your uglies." Daddy, needless to say, has long since given *that* up.) But it goes flat about half-way and finally surrenders much too quietly.

I came away with the feeling that it was a far better play than the

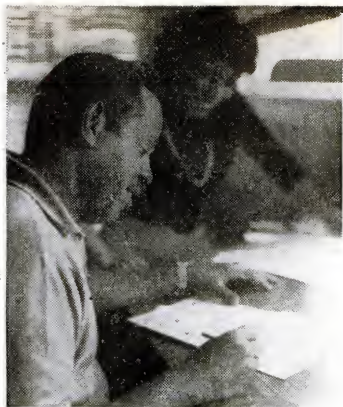
author realized, and that he had given it up much too soon. Or that both plays were exercises, notes for work which Mr. Albee has yet to do. I imagine that he will find it necessary to do much more violence to theatrical forms than he has so far done if he is to get his story told.

It is possible that what I am really complaining about here is a certain coldness, intrinsic to Albee, which will always mar his work. But I doubt this. For one thing, the venom which has gone into the portraits of the nurse in *Bessie Smith*, and the parents in *American Dream* does not argue too great a detachment, but too indignant a distaste. And he has a strange way with language, a beat which is entirely his, which may be controlled by the head, but which seems to be dictated from the guts.

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James Baldwin, essayist, novelist, and short story writer, also has written two plays: the provocative *Blues For Mr. Charlie*, which is currently being considered for a movie, and *The Amen Corner*. The current book market features Mr. Baldwin's collection of short stories, *Going To Meet The Man*, published by Dial Press. The author is now working on a novel, *Tell Me How Long The Train's Been Gone*.



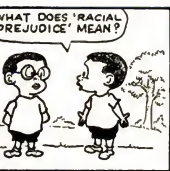
Integration In The Funnies

ANATOMY OF A NEGRO CARTOONIST

BY DENNIS M. BLANK

Readers of NEGRO DIGEST have long enjoyed the incisive wit of Morrie Turner via "Humor in Hue." Pictured below are samples from his series, Wee Pals, the first syndicated cartoon strip by a Negro

TWO small Negro boys stood on the sidewalk as another passed by. One said, "He believes people are prejudiced against him because of his color." The other boy asked, "How can we convince him?" "It's not worth the effort," the



boy replied. "You just can't teach some people to hate."

This comic scene was observed by thousands of Americans from Philadelphia to Oakland, Calif. For the first time in the past decade of tense civil rights conflicts and for that matter, at any time in America's history, people are invited to laugh with—not at—the trials and tribulations of the Negro in the funnies. It is a rare occasion indeed. Nothing has been more sadly neglected in the field of cartoon humor than the Negro.

The door was opened by Berkeley, California cartoonist Morrie Turner—the first Negro to be syndicated in the funnies—through his integrated comic strip, *Wee Pals*. Introduced just one year ago, *Wee Pals* is now seen by readers of ten major metropolitan newspapers. (It first appeared in *Negro Digest*, whose readers also enjoy Morrie's "Humor in Hue.")

His characters, all children—one Negro boy wears a Confederate cap—bounce with life and welcome freshness, satirizing the foibles of the American Negro and the realities of his relationship with the white man. The humor of *Wee Pals* carries the knockout punch of a prizefighter, the philosophical wit of Charlie Schulz's *Peanuts* and Morrie's own special brand of love and humor. He quickly points out that it will not be strictly devoted to Negroes but will deal also with the injustices of all minority races "as soon as I learn how to draw an Indian without using a feather."

"It's humor involving integration," comments cartoonist Dave Berger. "I think it's a terrific potential for newspapers."

Says one newspaper editor, "Morrie Turner's *Wee Pals* says what all of us feel but have been afraid to say with humor."

"I don't believe editors are ready to accept this thing," Turner says. Perhaps Negro humor is not yet ripe for public acceptance, as Morrie believes, but he cannot discount the overwhelming response already by his readers. Perhaps, also, Morrie says, if newspapers were more competitive, they would be more willing to give *Wee Pals* a chance.

Morrie's humor charades life with embarrassing and honest realism. The youngster who wears the Confederate cap was introduced in a sequence carrying a Confederate Flag in front of two other boys. One turns to the other and says, "Obviously, American history is not a required subject of the kindergarten class."

As a cartoonist, Morrie constantly seeks out his own self-confidence in each daily strip. "I die a thousand deaths over each idea," as he puts it. A self-trained graphic artist, Morrie toys with each new situation, often concerned that it will be understood and liked. "Maybe I worry unnecessarily how others will take it," he says.

Many of his faithful fans and close friends often see something else in the scenes and their own interpretation helps them to identify with the characters. As *Wee Pals*

comes to life in America's newspapers, they became a living institution for Morrie. "Sometimes it seems like they come to life and almost draw the strip for me," he explained. Even though his multi-racial cast of children go nameless, they are confined to a particular role because of their color or dress.

In one situation, for example, a white youngster, wearing glasses, tells his friend, a Negro boy, "Here comes a couple of kids, I'll demonstrate my theory."

As they approach, he slaps a Chinese boy in the face. A girl standing nearby, socks the bespeckled boy in the face. In the last panel we see him lying on the ground, gamely declaring, "See, it's like I told you . . . hate breeds hate!"

The words, hate and racism, are used cleverly by Morrie without bitterness but certainly with a touch of sadness in situations that have heavy moral overtones.

At 42, Morrie Turner and his *Wee Pals*, which he originally wanted to call, "Dinky Fellas," are fighting their way to the top. For a cartoonist—any cartoonist—success comes hard in the face of stiff competition from those who have made it and those who are flooding the market with an overabundance of new ideas.

The son of a Pullman porter, Morrie was raised in Oakland, the neighboring metropolitan city to Berkeley where he lives with his wife, Letha and young son, Morrie, Jr., 18, in a comfortable home.

As a young boy, drawing came naturally to Morrie. In grammar school one of his doodles of a football game with all 22 players was framed by the principal and proudly displayed on his office wall because it "had so much action in it." Morrie has been drawing ever since.

Even during World War II, while Morrie was serving with the Army-Air Force's 477th Bomber Group, his cartoons were providing laughter for the soldiers.

Married shortly after the war, Morrie made a living for awhile as a free-lance artist and then went to work as a police clerk in 1950 to support his family. By 1961, he decided it was time to find his "own soapbox." Since leaving the police department, he has spent fulltime creating Negro humor. During these 11 years, however, Morrie has produced more than 5,000 cartoons for 100 different magazines ranging from *True* to *Better Homes and Gardens*.

The development of *Wee Pals* was influenced by Comedian Dick Gregory, and Charlie Schulz, whom Morrie idolizes as one of the cartoon greats. His original all-Negro cast was flatly rejected by several major syndicates including *United Features*, which handles *Peanuts*, whose executives told Morrie *Wee Pals* would not be a profitable venture.

Nevertheless, Morrie did not give up. His big break finally came a little more than a year ago while the strip was running in a hometown

Negro newspaper, the Berkeley Post. It immediately caught the eye of Lew Little, head of a San Francisco syndicate, who convinced Morrie to integrate the strip. In the first week Little sold it to the Oakland Tribune, which bills Morrie as one of its former carrier boys, and other major dailies quickly followed suit, including the Richmond Citizen in Tennessee.

In just the short time that *Wee Pals* has been before the public it has found a welcome reception. The Women's Anti-Defamation

League of Philadelphia recently honored Morrie with its 1965 Humanitarian Award.

The Tribune and the Los Angeles Times, which also publishes *Wee Pals*, have nominated him for the National Conference of Jews and Christians Brotherhood Award.

Morrie is now producing another integrated Army situation strip for the Chicago Defender called, "Dogbert." It carries biting humor and gives Morrie a chance to let off steam.

Says Morrie candidly, "Where do I go from here?"



Dennis M. Blank, author of "Anatomy of a Negro Cartoonist," is himself a cartoonist as well as writer. Mr. Blank, a resident of Santa Monica, California, in addition to free-lance work, is the creator of a weekly comic strip, "Drawing a Blank," which appears in the Contra Costa Times, a newspaper which he also serves as county news and political reporter.

Perspectives

BY HOYT W. FULLER

April Writers Conference at Fisk

It will not be the first one—no, that distinction must go to little Alabama A & M College at Huntsville—but this month's writer's conference at Fisk University will be the biggest event of its kind in the history of letters. Under the direction of novelist John O. Killens, Fisk's writer-in-residence, a number of noted authors will assemble on the Nashville, Tennessee, campus to consider "The Image of the Negro in American Literature." A series of panels on poetry, drama, fiction, the novel and non-fiction prose will be important features of the conference, and poetry read by poets will add to the expected liveliness. The conference will open on the morning of April 22 and run non-stop through the evening of April 24.

Among the authors invited to participate in the three-day sessions are poets Melvin Tolson, LeRoi Jones, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden and Margaret Walker; novelists Saunders Redding, Ralph Ellison and Ronald Fair; playwrights William Branch, Loftin Mitchell, Alice Childress, Ossie Davis and Douglas Turner Ward; Gordon Parks, Alex Haley, Louis Lomax, Sterling Brown, Lerone Bennett Jr. and Arna Bontemps; and special guests K. G. Gilden (*Hurry Sundown*), Nat Hentoff, and Richard Rive of South Africa.

Detailed information is available through the Office of Information at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.



Random Notes: Several Negro authors were represented in the 250 books recently presented for the White House family library by the ABA. Among them: **Sammy Davis Jr.** (*Yes, I Can*); **Arna Bontemps**

(*100 Years of Negro History*); **James Baldwin** (*The Fire Next Time*); **Daisy Bates** (*The Long Shadow of Little Rock*); **Martin Luther King Jr.** (*Why We Can't Wait*); and **Albert J. Luthuli** (*Let My People Go*) . . . **Charles Harris**, the enterprising young bookman, left his post as editor of Double-day's Zenith series to assume responsibilities as vice president and general manager of Portal Press, a new subsidiary of John Wiley and Sons. This is a "first" in the publishing industry . . . Among the outstanding books for 1965 selected by the American Library Association: Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land*; Kenneth Clark's *Dark Ghetto*; and Melvin Tolson's



KILLENS



BRANCH

Harlem Gallery . . . New members of the National Institute of Arts and Letters are **Edward Albee, William Styron, John Kenneth Galbraith and Francis Steegmuller** . . . In an all but unheard of move, W. W. Norton Company, New York Publishers, voted to give their authors an across-the-board bonus of five per cent because of the firm's record-breaking 1965 sales . . . **Stanford W. Williamson**, who was divisional art director at Follett Publishing Company (Chicago) for 16 years, is now executive designer for the firm . . . Three anthologies of Negro-authored short stories are due this year. **John A.**

Williams is editor of one volume, **John Henrik Clarke** of another, and **Langston Hughes** of still another . . . Segments of the Rockford College festival of Negro arts, filmed last spring, are in the United States Information film repertory in Africa. Participants in the festival were **Lerone Bennett Jr., Saunders Redding, Robert Hayden, Brock Peters, William Warfield and Olatunji** . . . **Dr. Rosey Pool**, who sparked the first writers conference on a Negro college campus, will return to Alabama A & M College at Huntsville for the fall semester from her home in London.



The Squire of Messel

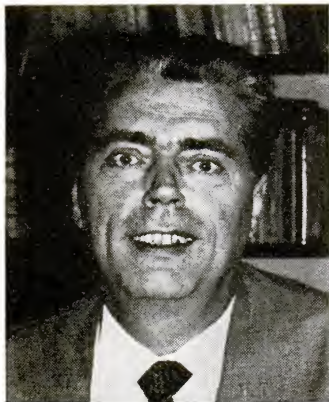
Janheinz Jahn is a one-man literary industry. Not only are there more than 40 titles published under his name, including books, articles, essays, and translations, but there also are countless translations of his books, articles, essays and translations, all having to do with some

aspect of African or Neo-African literature. The most famous of his books is, of course, *Muntu*, and the most recent to be published in the United States is *A Bibliography of Neo-African Literature from Africa, America, and the Caribbean*, published early last fall by Praeger.

Mr. Jahn lives with his wife, Edith, and his two sons, Aurel and Dominic, in a big, spacious house in the village of Messel. He is within commuting distance to Frankfurt, where one of the best and most extensive collections of pre-1900 Africana is available. And he is only a few minutes from Darmstadt, a lovely cultural center which boasts an artists' colony that would make any American writer, composer or painter drool with envy. The state provides a chalet and a stipend for the artist, leaving him free to create. It is the best of all possible environments for the work Mr. Jahn is doing.

That work involves the careful and detailed cataloguing of all literary work by Africans and persons of

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JANHEINZ JAHN

BOOKS



NOTED

Anger, and Beyond, edited by Herbert Hill (Harper, \$5.95), contains essays presented at the seminar on "The Negro Writer in the United States," held at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964. There are essays by Saunders Redding, Arna Bontemps, Horace R. Cayton, LeRoi Jones, Harvey Swados, Nat Hentoff, Robert Bone, Albert Murray, M. Carl Holman, Ossie Davis, an interview with Melvin B. Tolson, and a symposium by Hill, Cayton, Bontemps and Redding on Richard Wright. Several themes run through the book. One is the focusing of interest on several outstanding writers. Arna Bontemps examines the enigma of Jean Toomer, a writer of exceptional promise and power, who after his first book, *Cane*, turned his back on Negro literature. Bontemps calls this one of the sacrifices exacted by the racial myth. Robert Bone and LeRoi Jones also refer to Toomer, whose influential book is now out of print. Bone and Murray discuss Ellison at length; there are the symposium on Wright and the interview with Tolson. Another theme is the relation of Negro culture to American culture. LeRoi Jones rejects the white culture. Harvey Swados insists that the Negro is part of American culture. Robert Bone says that Ellison avoids the extremes of assimilationism and of black nationalism, but values both his folk culture and the Western culture of which he is a part, and is not about to give up either of them. Another theme is the importance of the music of the Negro. Murray, Bone and Tolson discuss the blues in relation to artistic form and the Negro's struggle to survive. Nat Hentoff says the life style of the blues singers needs to be further probed by Negro writers, and those values applied in their writing. The function of protest in literature is discussed. LeRoi Jones endorses it. Ossie Davis says the Negro writer has to be a protestant, but he himself adds laughter to protest to show America how ridiculous segregation is. One of the most thought provoking essays is Albert Murray's, who says that white promoters of the Negro Renaissance vitiated and commercialized the movement, and warns that today masochistic whites who encourage Negro writers in self-pity and insults and who praise inferior writing are of less worth than prize fight managers, who at least try to make their fighters champions. Recurring through the book is the belief that Negro writers, like Jewish writers before them, are on the verge of a breakthrough into the mainstream of American literature, ending the hegemony of the Anglo-Saxons. The book so abounds in insights, information, ideas, contradictions, parallels, and provocative opinions that one can only point to them in a short review. This is an important and stimulating book, one to be read, thought about, and discussed. Every Negro writer, everyone interested in literature by Negroes, every white writer, and everyone who is interested in literature at all, should read it.—Dudley Randall

There is an interesting ring to the title of a collection of Negro folk tales (published by Quadrangle, \$5.00), *Worser Days and Better Times*. It is earthy and unpretentious in sound and meaning and yet it contains a note of contradiction. These two notes haunted me throughout the book. On the one hand I was aware that something basic and earthy, sometimes even frothy in character, was being offered to me, but because the degree constantly varied from story to story, I felt that the book almost contradicted itself.

It has been stated that to truly understand a culture, one must understand what makes the people laugh. Mr. Brewer has provided the reader with some excellent stories giving in-

sight into the character and nature of Negro culture at various stages. The first section gives a good indication of the Negro's relationship to God and church, with particular emphasis on the minister. Later in the book, Mr. Brewer tells a story about a slave and how he relates to his master in "The Intelligent Slave." This tale represents most of the best elements of the book. It is funny and it is interesting: at the same time it provides us with a basic understanding of folkways of the era.

The book could have been reduced considerably in length and its value increased thereby if the hackneyed and forceless stories had been eliminated. However, there are enough tales of insight, interest and humor sufficient to make the book as a whole worthwhile.—Brooks Johnson



Langston Hughes's *Simple's Uncle Sam* (Hill and Wang, \$3.95), reminds you of the Senegalese soldier in World War I, who when told by a German in hand-to-hand combat, "You missed me!" answered, "Just shake your head and you'll find out." These conversations in a bar with Jesse B. Semple have the lightness and casualness of the newspaper columns from which they were drawn, but when you think they are all froth and humor, there's the keen cutting steel, as when Simple remarks that even Martin Luther King, with all his love, doesn't go into a white barber shop in the South for a haircut; or when Simple makes some warm comments on leaders' advice to stay cool; or when he advises young men seeking adventure to go not to the Wild West but to the savage South. Simple glances at his own folks too. He describes an evil Harlem waitress who piles meanness upon meanness. And there's a Dr. Sidesaddle who earns his living in Harlem but moves to a white neighborhood where "we are the only ones." This is a book of the people. It has the phrases, the accents, the feelings of the people. Simple is topical, but on topics which have been with us for three hundred years. Some of the chapters sharpen to vignettes, like "Lost Wife," which touchingly contrasts infidelity to love. Characters emerge—poised Lynn Clarisse from Fisk, bodacious man-eating Minnie, a scared white rookie cop alone in Harlem at night. Sometimes Mr. Hughes does not use keen steel, but a club, as in the farcical "Rude Awakening," where Simple dreams Negroes have taken over the South and he is Colonel Semple sitting on his veranda being served by his old faithful white Mammy Faubus. This reversal of the stereotypes uproariously exposes their ridiculousness so that no one

(Continued on page 94)



A Scene from Detroit's Concept-East Theatre production of The Toilet. Woodie King Jr. is the founder and former director of the Concept-East Theatre (Negro Digest, May 1963)

Viewpoint

Problems Facing Negro Actors

BY WOODIE KING JR.

"... The beginner doesn't know that white people, in general, don't know enough about Negro life to know which details to look for, how to absorb the interpretation the Negro actor wants to present"

THE problems of the Negro actor are not so much the Negro actor's problem as they are the white American problem. When an American Negro actor is faced with playing a character, he must also confront a trio of problems: First, should

BEGINNERS

the character be American in its truest sense? (When American life is most American it is apt to be most theatrical, says Ralph Ellison.) Second, should he be Negro as Negroes really are or Negro as we have led whites to believe we are in order to endure? And third, should the character be American Negro? (The peculiar sensation—double-consciousness—an American, a Negro: W. E. B. DuBois.) These problems are not easily solved since White America has already told us what the answers are going to be if we intend to act on *its* stage.

An old Negro actor told me he hated LeRoi Jones' two plays *The Slave* and *The Toilet* because they were too filled with protest. His student, a young beginner, agreed with him even to the point of accusing the plays of being vulgar. The strange thing was that the beginner had no idea of the kind of plays or the problems the old actor faced during the Thirties and Forties, no idea of the vast history of his craft. (I will get back to this a little later.) It was a strange conversation. The old actor putting down Jones for protest writing and at the same time telling me:

"Acting in the Thirties had life, vitality . . . Federal Theatre . . . Negro Macbeth . . . Roll, Sweet Chariot . . . Run Little Children. And the actors! Leigh Whipper, Edna Thomas . . . son, you ought a been there!"

Interested beginners view bad road companies, inexperienced stock companies, and cute community food digesters. These prospective actors watch plays and actors that say absolutely nothing. The parts the actors play are not worth the time and efforts put into them. Beginners watch plays that do not attempt to recreate our experiences; they watch 'cute' white plays because that is all White America wants.

A Negro actor can sometimes be found in these 'cute' little comedies—*Anniversary Waltz*, *Come Blow Your Horn*, *Enter Laughing*, *Kiss and Tell*, or something similar. His first lines set the Negro beginner's teeth on edge. The embarrassed prospective actor glances about the white theater. All the white faces are laughing at the excessive and ridiculous mannerisms the white director has given the Negro actor. If he makes it, the beginner is thinking, this must not happen to him. He must do exactly as the white actors else the audience will laugh at him simply for being a Negro on the stage, too. But the beginner doesn't know that white people, in general, don't know enough about Negro life to know which details to look for, how to absorb the interpretation the Negro actor wants to present.

After reading more plays and "how to act" books, he assumes that he is ready to be Henry Fonda, Marlon Brando, Sidney Poitier,

Cary Grant, Sir Laurence Olivier, etc. He scouts until he finds a white theatre group needing a flat painter, carpenter, coffee boy, etc. However, before he can get this job, he must be able to intellectually discuss Sartre, Albee, Pinter, Ionesco, Beckett, Brecht, and Stanislavski.

He can name a hundred white actors, but he can't name five Negro actors. This is a sad fact. Recently, I talked to a young actress who is paying a great deal of money for acting and singing lessons. She had never heard of W. C. Handy or Charlie Parker! And knew absolutely nothing about the history of the Negro theatre. Yet the beginner can tell one everything—after two months with the white group—about the white theatre; he will argue about staging a play, about what a writer means, about the way he would tackle a role if he ever played one.

Finally, the little social group will do a little comedy and the Negro beginner will be given a cute little "buddy" part. And the white audiences will laugh at him exactly as they had done at the plays he had watched that featured professional Negro actors.

The beginner will eventually learn the truth about all the little social groups. He will begin to doubt when white beginners continue to get leading roles, no matter how bad they are, while he paints sets and occasionally is rewarded with a walk-on or a "buddy" part. Or perhaps it will be

while reading J. Marriot's massive book on the theatre in which the author warns beginners (whites) against getting *with those little groups and working like a nigger* forever. He learns after about two years of hard labor that Sartre and Beckett are only talk with these little groups. And that they had no intention of using him except as comic relief.

UNIVERSITY THEATRE

The Negro actor enrolls, believing he will appear in the plays because he will be a student paying tuition to learn all phases of the theatre. However, he will not be taught all phases of theatre at a university, least of all acting. Again he is left out because the selections are mostly classics or some other form of archaic theatre that was written when the black man did not figure into the scheme of White America. And we know that the professors who select the plays are white, therefore personal idiosyncrasies enter into the problem. And they keep the Negro actor from the stage. The basic motive is simply resentment towards miscegenation on the American stage in general and the university stage in particular. America doesn't want the Negro actor to be a man on its stage.

And since the basic themes of American plays revolve around sex, the Negro actor's situation is tragic. The student obtains nothing at all. How can he when the

acted-out play on stage before an audience is the basic dynamics of such a study? The true understanding of acting comes when the student is involved in acting and producing before a live audience. And the professors destroy this by selecting classics which the Negro actor finds difficulty in acting, not to mention the difficulty of casting.

"I can't use you in this one Mr. _____. It's a Swedish (or Russian, Norwegian, French, etc.) play."

The majority of Negro actors who seek training in university theatre have traces of the southern dialect if they have not assimilated. And the way American education is today, one cannot have any traces of the South in speech. It is an awful but true fact. What, then, if the student actor is cast because of necessity in *Three Sisters*, *Enemy of the People*, *Antigone*, *St. Joan*, *Major Barbara*. . . ? Can he be convincing in such a dated repertory that was written when he did not figure into the scheme of things?

A drama department must seek "truths" in theatrical works. Many professors keep these "truths" in mind when casting, and very often avoid the Negro actor. The Negro actor cannot bring "truth" (as whites see it) to the classics.

However, a university will—if the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People complains—present *Emperor Jones* or *Othello*. And maybe the *Merchant of Venice* after consulting

the local synagogue. But a Negro actor cannot look forward to playing a lead character in a university theatre production. After graduating, he knows nothing about acting before an audience.

ITEM: I compared the average ratio of plays a Negro actor appeared in per season to the average number a white actor appeared in per season at Wayne State University in Detroit. I also compared the total number of plays of Negro graduates against white graduates. The ratio was 7 to 1.

DRAMA SCHOOL

The only place to obtain acting experience is the drama school. The Negro actor either goes to a theatre magazine or obtains information from a friend in the theatre, both stressing how great the instructor is at teaching Mr. Stanislavski's method. The actor finds his past acting experience brushed aside by the teacher. He is immediately tossed into a beginner's class. If he is above average (better than every white actor in the class) he will work with some 'name professionals.' If not, he will work with a teacher who has no knowledge at all about the Negro, and very little about acting.

The teachers know that established names are impressive to the new actor. He will occasionally mention the times he worked with Jesse Bonstelle, Petier, Garrick, Fiske, Modjeska, Brando, or Beaumont and Fletcher (not necessarily

in this order). Yet, the drama schools, with all their faults, are the only places where a Negro actor can sharpen his craft. This, of course, is because he actually works on a stage with others before a live audience.

Now, after a long and arduous journey, the young Negro aspirant becomes a professional actor. Some use the achievements of the past to guide their future. I said earlier I would get back to this. Now it is alright to be of the present; no one would knock this; but when a performer knows absolutely nothing of the history of his profession, how can he possibly understand the present? The most proficient actors in the business—James Earl Jones, Robert Hooks, Al Freeman, Jr., Diana Sands, Cliff Frazier, Brock Peters, Ivan Dixon, Abby Lincoln, Gloria Foster, Clarence Williams, III, Roscoe Lee Browne—know the past, present, and have ideas of some of the future problems they will encounter.

The photos by Carl Van Vechten and Vandamm of the late Charles Gilpin, Rose McClendon, Canada Lee, Frank Wilson, Jack Carter, Edna Thomas, Abbie Mitchell, and Freda Washington are the perfect examples of the glory of the past. They were the actors who brought forth to America the famous all-Negro productions of *Macbeth*, *Porgy*, *Haiti*, and other exciting plays via the Federal Theater Project. It grew out of Harlem, and it remains to this day an important contribution to the American stage.

I think it is because those actors had a purpose. So many of today's actors lack purpose and direction. How can one grasp for something when there is nothing to grasp? Shout in rage, if not really angry? And too, one cannot communicate and assimilate at the same time.

ITEM: In the midst of the present racial struggle in this country, our stage ignores it. It treats it as if it doesn't exist.

NEGRO PLAYWRIGHT

The Negro actor's situation can be bettered by (1) joining with Negro writers and (2) building an audience within the Negro community. I think this has been done with great results in Detroit at the Concept-East Theater and in Harlem with LeRoi Jones' Black Arts Theater. Both actor and playwright must be willing to experiment with new forms within their respective crafts. If this is done, the small churches and corner store-fronts will be filled with willing ears. And it can be done since there is no one to answer to but each other. It worked in Harlem with the American Negro Theater; they produced Phillip Yordan's *Anna Lucasta* with great results. It produced worthy plays by Negro writers: Abram Hill's *On Strivers Row*, and early plays by young Ossie Davis. And 20 years later Mr. Davis hit Broadway with his romping comedy, *Purlie Victorious*. Now Ossie Davis is an experienced writer; not one of the typical "library writers" (Clifford Odets) but one who has

the background in acting and directing within a Negro community.

And if we do not know yet that a play about Negroes must appeal to Negroes, we should leave the theatre. I do not mean they must love or hate it. But they must *identify* with it.

The playwright must seize new ideas and techniques if the Negro actor is to again be of any importance. He must disregard the argument he received in college—an argument for a standardization which is paradoxically strangling the actor's contribution.

ITEM: The plays of the early Abby Theatre in Dublin were not considered excellent unless they caused a riot. The Theatre, as it is today, without controversy and excitement (save LeRoi Jones), is dead theatre. It is a place to go and digest dinner.

The Negro playwright should write about what he understands. All around him, he can see what happens when white writers pen Negro "struggle situations." They all fail due to a lack of understanding the subject.

As a Negro playwright tells it, explaining to James Baldwin how Ketti Fring came to adapt Richard Wright's *Long Dream*: "She was sitting by this swimming pool, dig, and reading this book and she thought, 'this would make a perfectly darling play!' So she wrote the first few scenes and called out her butler, chauffeur, and maid; and read the first few scenes to them and asked, 'Now, isn't this the

way you poor, downtrodden, colored people feel about things?'

" 'Why, yes Miss Fring!' they answered. *After considering which is better, keeping Miss Fring happy or disliking the play.* (Italics mine) 'And, I thought so,' says the playwright. 'And on we go. And on and on'."

All the critics felt approximately the same about it after it opened on Broadway. Here, in part, is one example from John Chapman:

. . . I did depart after the first act of this one and reported to my newspaper that this act of *The Long Dream* was shoddy and lascivious—a degradation of my seat companion and of several admirable Negro actors . . . It seemed impossible that this play could have been adapted by the lady who did such a beautiful job of adapting Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*.

Of course the better things about the play were omitted by Mr. Chapman. The brilliant direction by Lloyd Richards; and the two excellent performances by Al Freeman and Lawrence Winters.

The same thing happened when Baldwin wrote *Blues For Mr. Charlie*. All his white characters were badly drawn; and many thought this would have been impossible for Baldwin to do, since it is he who stresses always that *Negroes know more about whites than whites know of themselves. Negroes have been taking care of their children and kitchens for over 300 years.*

I also think that more Negro novelists should write for the theatre. If *The Long Dream*, *The Cool World*, *Mandingo*, etc., then it should be John O. Killens, Ronald Fair, William Melvin Kelley, Chester Himes or some Negro writer doing the adapting. And even though Baldwin failed with his

white characters, his Negro characters were so real and vivid that one is held spellbound by them.

Let me say this in conclusion: If the Negro actor can impose his own values upon the American stage, namely, his past, present, and possible future, he can join with White America in controlling it.



Woodie King Jr., author of "Problems Facing Negro Actors," is the director of the Cultural Arts Program of Mobilization for Youth, Inc. on New York's Lower East Side. The founder and former director of Detroit's Concept-East Theatre, Mr. King has acted and directed for theatre, film and television productions. He served as drama critic for the Detroit Tribune for five years, and has published articles and short stories in various magazines including, on two occasions, **NEGRO DIGEST**.

A Young Playwright Speaks

THEATRE OF REALITY

By Ed Bullins

No one . . . knows how to scream any more, and particularly actors . . . no longer know how to cry out. Since they do nothing but talk and have forgotten they ever had a body in the theater, they have naturally also forgotten the use of their windpipes. Abnormally shrunk the windpipe is not even an organ but a monstrous abstraction that talks: actors . . . no longer know how to do anything but talk.

Antonin Artaud

The Theater and its Double

N THE contemporary American theater many times the black playwright finds himself in opposition to the black actor, principally when the actor manifests attitudes and behavior that the writer is engaged in altering.

There are considerations that a novelist does not concern himself with but that a playwright is compelled to if the playwright is realistic and sincere about having his work produced. The essential and most arbitrary element is humans: the producer, the director, the actors, the hypothetical audience,

and sadly, the critic.

A generality that can be made is that the producer of stageplays is concerned with making money. In America, there are the Becks of the "Living Theater" in New York which the police shut down. They are currently touring in Europe because America resisted their dedication to pure and non-commercial theater. The Becks believe that producing plays which advance or keep vital dramatic art is a duty. They are so antitraditional as to have staged Ezra Pound's adaptation of classic Japanese *Noh theatre*, and in contemporary spirit, presenting Kenneth Brown's *The Brig*, a dramatic experience which resists labeling, not being quite a play nor an antiplay. The Becks, present production, *Frankenstein*, which opened in Europe is "experimental," which stretches understatement to its limits, but it may be the boldest attempt at staging Antonin Artaud's ideas for a *theater of cruelty* to date. The Becks' "Living Theater" is as diverse as art.

And there are too few young, dynamic people today like Peter Rachtman of the West Coast. Rachtman is one of the group that brought LeRoi Jones' powerful *Dutchman* and *The Toilet* to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and though profit-oriented, Rachtman is not discouraged from staging productions of quality though they be against the *status quo* and not meek and quite white "American" (if they are good box office). This is only to say that quality sells as does trash. Ideally, low-keyed quality plays can be produced successfully as can more sensational ones in good or poor taste, and this also implies that plays by or about Negroes have to be neither sensational, controversial nor banal. (Cinema has broken this ground with films such as *Lilies Of The Field* and *Nothing But A Man*.)

But whatever the play it should be honest. If honesty is controversial then that is the truth of drama. So it is for the black playwright to do the best he can at his job of writing and presenting his vision and not become prematurely emasculated by the prospect of not being produced only because of his race and the themes which come naturally from his cultural experience.

A black playwright must find his producer as one of any color must, and as the black novelist has to seek out a publisher, though the

playwright may discover he has special handicaps in getting produced. For one, unlike the widening shelves of Negro novels, there have been only a small number of successfully produced Negro plays. That is, plays by Negroes, concerning Negro characterization, and created for the general audience, not that special, almost exclusively white audience which patronizes Negro drama for obscure exotic reasons.

There is hardly any precedent of success by which the Negro playwright can win his producer, and the producer, being commonly white, has the color-barrier as an intensifier of his suspicions that he is gambling on something into which he has minute insight. He worries that he can sell black novelty and innovation to a newly created audience. If there were any major black producers this factor might be reduced, but the situation appears to remain as it has been. The most relevant item in the playwright-producer relationship is cost. It may cost a producer 20 times more than a publisher to back black talent, and businessmen's ledgers are especially sensitive to two stains: red and black ink.

If there is a common prayer universally murmured by playwrights, one of its petitions is that their work get adequate direction. Adequate direction is usually more than the compulsion-driven play-

wright believes probable, and he feels inspired direction is entirely within the dimensions of miracle. When the playwright laments his past productions, the director is likely to be given a large share of the abuse, and the remainder goes to the aggregate components of the disaster. Of course, some playwrights can capably direct their own works, but this is rare; different aesthetic physics are at work in writing a play and manipulating the many elements that go into a staged play, and the writer is ordinarily too close to his "baby" to have the scope and objectivity needed to raise the work from the page and from within his imagination, so that it may be communicated completely to the audience. Happily for the novelist, he is the lord of the small universe he creates, and his fictional souls shuffle along in time to his whims and no other's.

The Negro playwright has a special problem in finding better than average direction: outside of the New York theater area there is an absence of capable black directors, and within New York the same statement possibly holds true. Why would a Negro playwright prefer a Negro director? It could be assumed by the writer that a director with like cultural experiences could better interpret the nuances and shading of meanings in the work, identifying somewhat with the characters, situations, and with the theme. If the reverse is true, if

the playwright prefers *any* excellent direction to that of the average, then it is a problem that belongs to every playwright: to have his work interpreted skillfully, and when the playwright understands that the best direction is beyond the simple limits of interpretation, then the director's art and understanding of theater techniques can begin working, much to the benefit of the total production.

The total production stands very nearly upon the performances of the actors. Even Shakespeare has taken many a pratfall behind the ineptness of actors. For the playwright of color, finding qualified Negro actors for his cast is difficult, though there are numerous available bodies ready to stand before the lights and expose their teeth and overblown egos.

Of all his problems, the Negro playwright's greatest is the young "trained" actor and actress of his same race, not the lack of trained people. This training does not necessarily qualify these actors for many roles the black playwright has in mind. If a Negro playwright is to write effectively and honestly he must draw upon his experience. All Negroes do not come from the ghetto, naturally, but if the situations the playwright creates upon stage have characters he knows to have basis in truth, ordinarily these are black characters. It is very difficult for many Negro actors and actresses to identify with Negro characters from

the masses, though they do well representing extremely middle class Negroes. The same may hold true for young white actors.

At auditions the black playwright might observe a black actress mouthing her lines like a white telephone operator or bouncing through a scene set in the black ghetto of South Philadelphia as if she were Doris Day aping the American version of the blue-eyed girl next door. Some male Negro actors appear horrified when asked to speak like Sonny Liston, and seem offended and say that they can not talk *that* way and will not even say *those* words. They mince out the exits leaving behind remarks like, "I thought an *actor* was needed." Sadly, the black playwright did not have it in him that day to create the modern American Othello or Cleopatra; he merely wrote from what he knew, so his contemporary play was left in need of just black actors, ones who were not afraid to *act* as black human beings.

A playwright's major problem as opposed to a novelist's is that each of his characters must be what he is; they all must stand tall. This must be brought out by the convincing performances of the actors. To be what the character is, then the actor must portray the character in an honest and natural manner. But today, it would not seem unlikely that a director would come before a Negro actor newly graduated from an

American school of acting and spend hours with him saying, "Now, remember, in this part you are a Negro. You are black!" And the pity is that the actor would really have to sweat to get into his role; he would have to work diligently convincing himself that he was indeed Negro.

Often a characterization falls; the actor, the director or the playwright fails, collapsing the structure of the play's reality about their ears. A novelist has more range to ramble in than his characters' believability or their situations. He can even chat, philosophize and wisecrack with his readers. Characters in drama are resented by the audience for their not sticking to the point, maintaining the honesty of their motivations. With the Negro playwright it is the Negro actor who dramatizes the vital characters, and the actor must breathe the truth of his own conviction in that character for his portrayal to be perfect.

But not all the blame rests with the black actor or his schooling. There are interracial, and a few entirely Negro, theater groups training black actors to do little other than the Greek classics, Shakespeare, Chekhov and Shaw, casting Negroes indiscriminately in every conceivable role, a sort of white characterization done in authentic black face. True, the experience for the actor is invaluable and should be a part of his training, but a hidden evil exists in the contin-

uation or the strict adherence to this brand of liberality. It is a self-defeating device for the actor. The black actor is unintentionally made to say in essence that he can act too; he, a black man, can do the classic repertoire of the continent as can a white actor. That he can *act* and not only be stereotyped in butler roles set in the *ante bellum* South. Well, it should be known that he can act, especially by the actor. One of his number has won an Oscar, and others appear on nationwide TV, though it is questionable whether these are any criteria of adequate professional standards. Incidentally, these black actors play Negroes, not Creon.

Following the above type of reasoning is tantamount to the black author's wasting years telling his waiting readers that he can write, that he is concerned with the art of writing and nothing else, but getting almost no writing completed and in print, aside from his infrequent artistic manifestos sent out to indicate that he is still breathing. The fight by the black actor to prove that he can act is as much over as the black writer's fight to prove that he can write, and both should get to work at their crafts and be aware that Aristotle and his aesthetic dogmas are not of this time and never had been meant for the black artist anyway. There are new roles, new themes and new definitions being created and explored now, and the black actor and writer should become aware.

In approaching one of the "artistic" black theater groups, the Negro playwright's scripts may be taken and returned shortly and the playwright told that his work is too "experimental" or "obscene" if it uses too much of the Negro idiom of the ghetto.* The group's premise might be that when Negroes of flesh and blood are depicted on the stage, that this is verging upon revolution and is too drastic; it is far beyond the group's range of belief and comprehension. They can not become familiar with a real Negro on the stage. Or the playwright may be told that *they* do not bother with original scripts, that *they* do the classics or the work of proven Negro writers "like Langston Hughes," that is, the Negro writers who have made it somewhat with the white press and then are considered minor celebrities by the black bourgeoisie, then the artsy craftsy colored folk accept them as their own. When asked why *they* do not produce young black playwrights, the answer almost invariably is, "There are none, are there?" Of course there are none to their knowledge because of their refusal to look for or acknowledge any until the white critics deem it correct for them to. With this situation existing, entering little theater for the black playwright is more than likely not an asset to his career but

* The author has no personal experience of any other theater activity outside the West Coast.

a handicap, for he will seldom find other than the conventional, timid and intellectually lazy and backward bourgeois black masquerading as an artist.

The *theater of reality* should be mentioned now when speaking of the audience and the critic. The revolutionary nature of this theater is not of style and technique but of theme and character. Any theatrical style or method can be used separately or in combinations to reach the truth of the play. In this manner the play could begin naturalistically with a character in a realistic setting and progress through expressionism, surrealism, absurdity and back to realism, dramatizing the journey of the character through his own psyche to reach his loss of innocence, self-awareness or illumination. To reach what individually is called reality. The method is not the goal in this theater; the result must elicit the single response of "Yes!"

So it is not a call for a return to realism or naturalism that this theater calls for; it is the exposure of illusion through exploding myths and lies that are disguised as reality and truths. These myths, and especially those concerning the black man, clutter the heart of his existence, his humanity. Nor is this theater a plea for his humanity, time will not be wasted in silly issues.

This theater is not exclusively about Negroes nor for Negroes; its trend should only go counter to

that force in Western society which dehumanizes, enslaves and defeats man at his best, whether this force originates in man's institutions or his bewildered psyche that has built a defense and power-structure that can not be much longer contained. This theater, in this century, may be viewed as against society, the American society in particular. By white critics it will undoubtedly be misnomered "protest literature," and, Yes, it will certainly expose some of the wrongs of the society. For this theater is against the hypocritical cant and morality of this sick society and demonstrates how sick the society is by exposing her sores, her warped humans. If this is social realism or protest then let it speak reality for all people, not only a temporarily deprived selfish middle-class.

Today, the bulk of the theater going audience is white. One problem for the Negro playwright is that part of the audience will resist the reality of his characters; they will refuse to identify with black characters in any way, even the middle-class Negro members of the audience will fight the characters if they come from the "submerged" elements of the culture. The characters of the new reality will be fought whether they are upon a stage or found in a book, and most of the inaccurate criticism of Negro works have had this kind of bias at its roots. The white critic is deceived by himself

and his colleagues, and the university departments of literature, always 25 years behind, perpetuate and sustain these myths. One great boring myth is that black writers are collectively engaged in writing protest literature and can or will do little else. These same people should get hip to Chester Himes, a talent of major proportions, who has been around before a lot of them. This lie of *protest* has circulated so widely and convincingly that it has damaged most contemporary Negro writers; as passed over earlier, it may have destroyed the most talented black writer of today, but, perhaps the times will rescue him for his art.

And it is hokum: lately, two of the most authentic works of black protest literature have been the book *Black Like Me* and the documentary play *In White America*, and both have been authored by white men. But small knowledged English professors across the country, if they mention it at all, without having seen the production or having read the script, are branding LeRoi Jones' play, *The Toilet*, a protest play when it is simply a love story done in a melodramatic, naturalistic vein.

The writer can not worry about the audience; he knows there is a small hard-core audience for him and they will discover one another, and luckily the audience will grow to universal proportions. And the

writer knows that there is only one critic, himself. All that a reviewer or a critic can do positively for a writer is to get him more audience appeal or get him more readers. If the critic fails to achieve this, then the writer should dismiss him. The black writer knows that the critics are white, and they are most certain not to understand his work or get its finer points, especially when the writer is not slanting his work to a middle-class white audience, and he is setting his own limitations and not relying upon the critics' judgments.

Honesty is what the writer should be after. The *theater of reality* is an attempt to return to man's honesty to himself, to his fellows and in his vision. It is indeed a theater of metaphysical yearnings. The playwright does this job by uncovering the reality of his art, his humanity, his existence as an intelligent and moral entity in the universe, and makes the entire universe an audience of this transformation of the psyche and spirit; this new revolution is of the mind and spirit. And the revolution seems to have begun, and if it has there are many facets to it. There are the doers, there are the theorists, and there are the chroniclers and story tellers. Each is working from within a framework of reality which can always be expanded, illuminated, and, hopefully, passed on.

Ed Bullins, a San Francisco playwright, has had stories and essays published in various periodicals.

Humor in Hue

By Morrie



"We don't call it a 'Bust-out' plan . . . we refer to it as a 'Freedom Movement . . .'"



Middle-class housing is represented by developments like the above in the suburbs of Dakar. There also are individual villas

Festival Time In Dakar

From April 1-24, thousands of people of Negro descent from all over the world will assemble in the Senegalese capital for an unprecedented celebration of cultural solidarity and a living illustration of the concept of Negritude—the First World Festival of Negro Arts

The Festival

IT IS a grandiose idea, and—as such ideas are likely to be — characterized by a certain dreaminess. But that is not necessarily a fault. Without great dreams, many little miracles would not be possible.

The chief dreamer is Leopold Sedar Senghor, the poet-president of Senegal. Like most serious African leaders, President Senghor is concerned with Africa's achievement of genuine power and consequence in the world, and he feels that the edifice of African power and consequence must be built on a base of cultural security.

"The historical significance of the First World Festival of Negro Arts flows from two facts," President Senghor told the Senegalese people. "The first is that the Festival will be held in Dakar, in Senegal, in other words in Africa, the birthplace of the Negro people—of *homo sapiens* himself, even — where it will mean something more than a return to original sources; it will be a case of man sinking his roots into Mother Earth.



ely citizen strikes a pose on a street corner near the *medina*

"The second fact is that the stage of defending Negritude has passed, and that the Festival will serve, rather, to illustrate it; and as an illustration and no longer a theoretical exposition, it will constitute a definite action, a positive contribution to the construction of a civilization based on universal values. In a word, we will have ceased once and for all to be cultural consumers and will, at long last, ourselves become cultural producers.

"Such, then, is the significance of this event which will mark the advent of a new era for us: the era of cultural independence. I say independence and not autarchy—far from it, because the works to be assembled and displayed here will almost invariably have been enriched by foreign contributions. And it is well that this should be so, since the problem for Negritude in this Twentieth Century of ours, is to participate in the convergence of all mankind—not exactly, in this atomic century, by contributing new techniques but by contributing a new style, a soul, the same which quickened the pulse of *homo sapiens* when the sun of reason rose above the horizon . . ."

It is the language of poetry.

The actual planning of the First World Festival of Negro Arts was entrusted to a local committee at Dakar and to the governments of the dozens of countries in Africa and the Americas which indicated interest in participating in the Fes-



In the central market, a colorfully-garbed housewife stops to chat with a friend while market women arrange their vegetables for sale

tival. The Festival's aims were generally outlined as follows:

—To permit Negro artists throughout the world to return periodically to the sources of their art.

—To make known the contributions of Negritude, "a Negro's pride in his race and a recognition of the

Inness-Brown of New York City. John A. Davis, president of the American Society of African Culture, is the committee's vice president; Marian Anderson is vice-chairman of the committee's board of directors; and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, wife of the President of the United States, is honorary



Independence Square, or *Place de l'Indépendance*, is an attractive park in the city's center

Negro's unique creative ability based on his African heritage."

—To make it possible for Negro artists to meet and demonstrate their talents to members of the international art world.

—To advance international and interracial understanding.

The American committee for the Festival is headed by Mrs. Virginia

chairman of the committee.

In many ways, the American participants in the Festival will strikingly illustrate the concept of Negritude — the African origin, the pride of race, and the amalgamation of cultures. Prominent among these participants will be Miss Anderson, Duke Ellington and his orchestra, baritone William War-

field, soprano Martina Arroyo, dancer Arthur Mitchell and gospel singer Marion Williams.

All the lively and plastic arts will be exhibited during the 25 days of the Festival—from April 1-24. There will be exhibitions of contemporary paintings, as well as of traditional African sculpture; several African countries will present their national dance and theatre troupes; choral groups will appear from the United States (the DePaul Chorus) as well as from the Congo (Leopoldville) and other countries; and a nightly pageant under the

Modernistic apartment building opposite the radio center houses the sleek Daniel Sorano Theatre, one of the most up-to-date entertainment centers in the world



Hotel N'Gor, the largest and most luxurious hotel in Dakar, is located on the beach near the airport



Administration building houses most of the government's minor offices

stars will blend African folk music, Negro spirituals and 19th Century European compositions.

Grand prizes will be presented in the areas of literature, film-making and performing, music composition, and popular entertainment; and a special colloquium on "Negro Art in the Life of the People" will draw authorities on Negro life and art from all over the world to Dakar.

Exhibitions and Prizes

- Nigeria is the "star" nation for the First World Festival of Negro Arts and, as such, has the right to the only exhibition dedicated to one particular country. The Dakar town hall has been chosen as the exhibition hall for the special Nigerian presentation.
- There will be some 800 specimens on view in the new museum, carefully selected to "reflect aspects of economic, technical, social, religious or cultural life." The exhibition will be taken to Paris following the Festival.
- The Great Hall of the Palace of Justice will house the exhibition of modern and contemporary art sent to Dakar by the 40-plus countries participating in the Festival. The American artists' work will be on display here.
- In the area of art, prizes will be presented in the following categories: best painter; best sculptor; best engraver; best tapestry designer; and best drawing. The Grand Prize will be awarded to "the artist who has, while deeply rooted in the



Negro world, reached a very high level of artistic and human expression."

- The Grand Literary Prize of the World Festival of Negro Arts will be awarded by the Festival Association and the Society of African Culture. Other prizes, in cash, will be awarded by other organizations in the following categories: best novel; best collection of poetry; best essay; best treatise on Negro art; best historic or scientific essay; best piece of reporting on the Negro world; best play. Materials published between January 1962 and September 30, 1965 are eligible.

- There will be two special prizes: for the best essay on the signifi-

cance of traditional African art; and the best collection of poems for children.

- Prizes in the forms of a Golden Antelope (for the Grand Prize) and a Silver Antelope (for First Prizes) will be awarded in the realm of films in the following categories: best director; best actor; best actress; best educational film; best film scenario; best documentary film on the Negro world; best film on Negro art. There is a January 1962 limit for age on all competing films and performances.

- There will be prizes for recordings in much the same variety as for literature and films, but with the following categories: tradition-



The new museum (on opposite page) occupies site on a tiny peninsula along the sea-coast. The old museum (left) is located in center of the city



The National Assembly building was constructed originally to house territorial assembly before independence for French West Africa



The new library of the University of Dakar is one of the most modern and imposing structures in the city

al or religious African songs; traditional African instrumental music; typical modern African orchestras; jazz bands; jazz soloists; spirituals and gospels; Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian songs; West Indian music.

The City

Dakar is a city of some 375,000 people, a port-city on the Atlantic which also is an important terminal for flights between Europe and South America. It is an old colonial center, but it is a very new city—it is, in fact, two cities: the principal city is a glittering aggregation of modern government buildings, apartments and villas, with broad boulevards and cozy

parks; the other city is a conglomeration of shacks—some of them all but incredible—and pungent market places and *medinas* straight out of the ancient past.

The main city is French-flavored and, mostly, French-occupied. There are some 30,000 Europeans in Dakar—or there were that many until the recent decision from Paris cutting back on military outposts in Senegal and other African countries closely associated with the French Government. The Europeans reside in most of the beautiful villas and plush apartment buildings on the plateau, the cosmopolitan heart of the city, but not because there is racial segregation (there emphatically is not): only a



A street scene on the island of Goree, historic site which once served as headquarters for British and Dutch Slave traders



The Great Mosque, one of the city's landmarks, is one of few buildings not constructed under colonial auspices

few Africans can afford to live in such luxury. Also, the better shops along the avenues William Ponty and Maginot and bordering Independence Square are owned by the French, and those not owned by the French are in the hands of Lebanese and Greek traders.

The other city is predominantly African. Its borders are not geographical, for Africans live throughout the city, even on the plateau. The French colonialists, being less racist than the British, did not disdain the Africans in whose midst they found themselves, and so they built their villas next door to the African huts. The African city is principally distinguished by the style and quality of its housing. The better of these old residences are low, rambling structures, walled-in from the street and set around a courtyard; the worst of them are wood and cardboard lean-tos. But there are the *medinas*, the "native quarters," which stretch for miles, depressingly, toward the developing suburbs.

But all in the African city is not depressing—far from it. Some of the new housing developments beyond the *medinas* are handsomer than any similar residences Negroes occupy in America. They were designed for middle-income people, and there are individual villas, replete with gardens and garages, as well as blocks of apartments. There also are shopping centers, usually with new movie theatres.

With one key exception—the

ministry of Finance—the government of Senegal is in the hands of Africans, and it is Africans one sees relaxing against the burgundy upholstery of the huge Citroen limousines (the Cadillacs of France) gliding through the streets. But Africans are all but absent in significant industry and business. In the sprawling markets, the African stalls are the poorest and least attractive, and Africans are present in the offices of the utilities and the professional services primarily as clerks.

There are more than 30 hotels in Dakar, a few of them (N'Gor, Croix du Sud) very good, a few of them fair (Vichy, Hotel de la Paix, Atlantic, Plateau), but most of them quite small and ordinary. There are many restaurants, some of them excellent, and nearly all of them French. The exceptions are the Vietnamese and Lebanese restaurants. There are no African-owned restaurants in Dakar that Americans would want to patronize.

One of the liveliest nightclubs is African-owned—the Nianey. It is located on *la corniche*, the seaside drive, and it is as well-appointed as any of the others. Discothèques are popular, and there are several to choose from. The music is as familiar in Dakar as it is in Atlanta, and the dancing is not very different.

There are several sidewalk cafes, a large number of movie theatres, super markets and shops selling

everything from mink coats to razor blades. Some of the most interesting shops (for being exotic) are owned by the Lebanese and Greeks, and they feature items of clothing and utility which appeal to the religious faith of the African populace.

That faith is Islamic. An estimated 90 per cent of the Senegalese are Moslems. The Great Mosque is a structure of imposing stature and considerable beauty. There are several dozen lesser mosques scattered throughout the city, and an astonishingly elegant mosque at Touba, some 35 kilometers from Dakar.

The People

The dominant race—or tribe—in Dakar, as in all Senegal, is Wolof. Other races are Peul, Serere, Tukolor, Diola and Malinke. The Wolofs are prominent in government, education and in the arts. The Senegalese have been in the vanguard for generations, for they were favored by the French administrators during colonialism as teachers and sub-officials throughout the vast French West African empire.

The large number of French people in Dakar is a consequence of the city's choice as governmental, industrial, and educational center during colonialism. Thousands of Frenchmen pulled up roots in France and settled in Dakar, and many of those still living there were born there. They no longer control the actual machinery of govern-

ment, but the industry remains solidly in their hands. And while an increasing number of Africans are assuming key jobs in education, top posts in the university and the secondary schools are held by Frenchmen and other Europeans. The president of the rapidly growing University of Dakar is French, for example.

Next to the French, the major merchants in Dakar are the Lebanese and Greeks. They are traders by tradition, and whole blocks in the center of the city are lined with their shops, one little different from the other, all selling the brilliant cloth and Arab robes so popular with the Africans. The Near Easterners, like the French, have little to do with the actual business of running the government.

A colorful minority in Dakar are the Moors, the angular, handsome nomads from Mauritania who reap considerable wealth through the establishment of small stores in the African areas. There are few Moorish women among them. Apparently, the Moors come down (on foot!) from Mauritania in teams of three or four, spend a period of three or four months minding the stores (which remain open virtually around the clock), then return to their families while others take over the commercial chores. They live very simply, spending money only on food, their simple blue-and-white or black-and-white robes, and on sandals. They socialize with none of the other groups.

Another minority in Dakar are the "Portuguese," an artificial "race" of Portuguese and African ancestry. They hold themselves somewhat aloof from the ordinary Africans and yet they lack the status of the educated Africans. They are clerks, barbers and minor functionaries.



Festival Facilities

- At the cost of some \$1,500,000, the government renovated and enlarged Yoff Airport, perhaps the busiest air terminal south of the Sahara.

- A new classic-lined museum was especially built to house the country's impressive collection of African art and artifacts. The collection of art and sculpture which has been assembled from all over the world for the Festival also will be exhibited there.

- The Daniel Sorano Theatre, one of the most modern and most comfortable theatres in the world, was built for the Festival. Most of the performances will be presented there before a select audience. The theatre seats only 1500.

- Amity Stadium, which will accommodate some 15,000 persons, also was built for the Festival. All performances held at the Daniel Sorano Theatre also will be held in the stadium so that the general public can attend.

- Goree Island, one of the historic sites of Africa, will be the scene of a nightly "Sound and Light" spectacle during the Festival. The island served as a staging area for many of the hundreds of thousands of Africans who were sent into bondage during slavery. It also was inhabited by the Dutch, English and French during different eras, and served as a fort for France during the two World Wars. On one end of the island, the elaborate underground tunnels and fortifications, reminiscent of the Maginot Line, remain pretty much as they were originally.

The United States gift to the Senegalese Government for the Festival is a handsome motor launch which will transport visitors from the Dakar docks out to Goree Island. The trip takes about 25 minutes.

Festival Footnotes

- While Christians represent only about six per cent of the Dakarais population, there are several remarkably handsome Catholic churches in the city, and the cathedral of Dakar, which occupies a site at the very center of the plateau section, is an impressive edifice. Some of the choral music performances will be presented at the cathedral.

- The brilliant costumes of the African women—lavenders and crimsons and chartreuses are favorites—will startle many American Negroes, but the sight should prove once and for always that bright col-

ors *definitely do* compliment dark skins. Black American women traditionally have shied away from brilliant colors, for much the same reason that many Negroes refuse to eat watermelon, but the sari-like costumes in Senegal might begin to change all that.

- The Artisan Village, a little compound where ceramists, goldsmiths and silversmiths, weavers and sculptors work, display and sell their products, has been upgraded and modernized for the Festival. Visitors will find, unfortunately, that prices also have been upgraded and modernized. The best buys here probably will be gold and silver jewelry, as other items may be bought more reasonably by haggling with peddlers along Avenue William Ponty or on the streets of the city.

- Haggling over price, incidentally, is a tradition in Africa. The buyer who pays the first price asked by the seller will be "taken". Africans expect to argue and bargain, and they are skillful at it. However, for the American, unaccustomed to such practices, the danger is that inflated prices will be paid for items.

- The sight of men walking along the streets holding hands might startle some Americans, but it shouldn't. It means only that they are Moslems and friends, and not—as the late Richard Wright naively assumed—that they are sexual (or homosexual) partners.

- There are some 45,000 lepers in Senegal, and some of them will

appear as beggars on the streets of Dakar.

- Visitors to the Festival must expect to be regularly accosted by beggars, as well as by platoons of peddlers. Many handicapped Africans are trained to beg for a living, and the practice is encouraged by the concept of charity in the Islamic faith.

- Only those with very strong stomachs and insatiable curiosity are advised to brave the bowels of the great central market. But for those, the experience will be worth it. It is fascinating, for example, to watch the women hack and apportion the huge fish sold in the market's lower depths.

- The French in Dakar will be hostile at worst and will feign monumental indifference at best. They should be ignored. However, Festival visitors should insist on courtesy and service, as they certainly will be paying for it.

- A dollar is worth 250 francs (French-African Community francs, not the kind from France) on the books, but the local bank exchange is about 245 francs for a dollar travelers check and 241 for a dollar bill. That does not include the one per cent charge for making the exchange.

- All visitors to the Festival should have visas, preferably obtained before entering the country. However, President Senghor has given assurances that visas will be available at the Dakar airport for those arriving without them. There is a charge.

● Visitors also should have round-trip or in-transit tickets, indicating that they will travel on from Senegal after the Festival.

● Apart from taking the usual smallpox and yellow fever and cholera and typhus shots, visitors to Senegal should take along dependable anti-malaria pills.

● Taxis are plentiful in Dakar, and they have meters. Visitors should not pay more than is indicated on the meter—except late at night, when the meter tab is doubled as a

sort of service tax.

● Tipping in Senegal is not done according to American—or even European—custom. A five per cent tip is considered adequate.

● There are several excellent beaches at Dakar—at the Hotel N'Gor, below the coastal drive near the residence of the American ambassador (Mercer Cook Sr.), and below the park along Boulevard Roosevelt. There also is an excellent beach at Goree Island. Restaurants are located nearby.



The Native Intellectual and the *Fellah*

“In order to assimilate and to experience the oppressor’s culture, the native has had to leave certain of his intellectual possessions in pawn. These pledges include his adoption of the forms of thought of the colonialist bourgeoisie. This is very noticeable in the inaptitude of the native intellectual to carry on a two-sided discussion; for he cannot eliminate himself when confronted with an object or an idea. On the other hand, when once he begins to militate among the people he is struck with wonder and amazement; he is literally disarmed by their good faith and honesty. The danger that will haunt him continually is that of becoming the uncritical mouthpiece of the masses; he becomes a kind of yes-man who nods assent at every word coming from the people, which he interprets as considered judgments. Now, the *fellah*, the unemployed man, the starving native do not lay a claim to the truth; they do not say that they represent the truth, for they *are* the truth.”
—Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Grove Press).

AND SAVE A ROUND FOR JAMIE BROWN

BY ANITA R. CORNWELL

"Then Retha Hodges glided into his elevator, breaking the shackles from his haunted heart, yet already he was her willing slave had she but known it"



HE stood in front of the bar—a tall, thin, forlorn figure in soiled khakis—fingering the change in his pockets.

He was new in town, having just hopped off an interstate tractor trailer some thirty minutes ago, and he knew he should be looking for some place to sleep, but the one dollar and forty-seven cents clutched in his bony hand did not provide the needed encouragement.

A brisk September breeze swept down the Avenue, banging against his hunched shoulders, and he looked around, wondering if he'd ever see a friendly face again. Then from inside the bar he heard the jukebox hammering out a down home blues which set the wheels of memory spinning in his aching head. He jerked his hands from his pockets and slowly pushed through the battered door.

The music was still loud and going good as he slid onto a corner stool and plunked his quarter down so there'd be no question concerning his ability to pay. He ordered a glass of beer then pulled out a crumpled pack of stale cigarettes. The record ended and soon he was aware of one man pulling away from the small group at the other end of the bar and apparently headed in his direction.

The stranger, gingerly holding a bottle of beer in one hand and a long thin cigar in the other, wore a wide brim beige felt hat which set firmly on his head as though welded

there, and a yellow silk tee shirt which stretched endlessly across his bulky chest and disappeared down into black gabardine slacks tightly gathered at waist and ankles. His tan, narrow-toed shoes made quick tapping sounds on the hard bar-room floor, and any moment Jamie fully expected the fellow to stick the cigar between his teeth, yank the hat from his head and break into the old soft shoe routine. As he neared Jamie's stool, his leathery face broke in a gap-toothed grin. And Jamie, not quite knowing what else to do, lifted his glass and drained it.

Surprisingly enough, Jamie Brown, Jr., the perennial country boy, and Harry "Lem" Yonkers, one-time country boy now turned city slicker, hit it off rather well.

"I was born in South Carolina," Lem told Jamie after they had moved over to a booth, "but once I lit outta them woods, I never looked back." He gave a significant pause, then, "You from down that way, too, I bet?"

Jamie nodded. He was born in Georgia in the midst of the depression, but he'd been travelling since he was old enough to hop a moving freight. "I been in Charlotte a while," he said carefully.

Lem was silent as he lit a fresh stogie. Then, taking a long pull from his beer, he ran one finger across the small, neat mustache which hugged his lip like a pencil mark. "The law after you—?"

Jamie shook his head. "Woman trouble," he said grudgingly, then

began fishing around for another cigarette.

Lem grinned, "I guess you busted," he said finally.

Jamie nodded, his brooding eyes staring at his beer glass. He hadn't allowed himself to wonder why Lem was being so friendly. So if it was a "little game in the back room" he was after, he could move on now.

However, Lem only leaned back against the booth, his odd, cat-like eyes examining the ceiling while his mind seemed busy with some far off activity. "I got a room up on the Avenue," he began slowly, "and if you ain't quite prepared to put up at the Bellevue, maybe you'd like to try your luck there till you git straightened out?"

Jamie's stomach muscles tightened. If there was one thing he was sick of, it was sharing other people's rooms. In Charlotte, when he wasn't with his girl, he had his cousin's two small but over-active boys in the bed next to his. And back home he'd slept on a pallet under the kitchen table. Even now he could feel that hard floor trembling as an outraged March wind tore at the corners of that crumbling shack. He looked over at Lem, almost ready to refuse the offer.

But the agile Lem jumped ahead of him. "Of course," he began amiably, "if you have other plans now, don't let me interfere."

And Jamie, of course, had no plans. There were dreams but nothing that included an immedi-

ate roof over his head. So finally he accepted Lem's invitation and decided to worry about motives later.

Lem's room, up around 22nd street, was fairly comfortable and surprisingly clean. The bed looked terribly tempting to Jamie who had been sleeping on everything but a bed for the past several weeks. Lem explained that the landlady took care of everything. "Just leave your clothes in the bathroom," he said to the bone-weary Jamie, "Miss Mamie'll tend to 'em."

Late next morning while Jamie dressed in his freshly laundered clothing, Lem slumped down into the lone comfortable chair, propped his narrow-toed shoes up on the out-dated coffee table and began sounding Jamie out. Whereupon Jamie promptly announced his intentions of finding gainful employment.

Lem nearly swallowed his stogie. "Man, you crazy or something? That eight to five crap is for squares. You one of th' little people and black to boot. You ain't ever gonna git nowhere nohow, so you may as well live while you standing still in your own little rut."

Turning his back on Lem, Jamie grunted, his hands deep in his pockets, his eyes raking the Avenue, his mind a thousand miles away on Caro, the girl who had two-timed him in Charlotte. Finally, he looked back at Lem who was still on the same old tune.

"The way I figure it," Lem was

saying rather smugly, "a man's gotta use his head to git along in this old world. Now me, I can git a little lucky at times. So I get picked up now and then. So what?" he demanded, waving a languid hand. "There ain't hardly any more bugs in the cooler than here, and I don't hafta worry 'bout the rent or the women hounding my door."

His eye caught Jamie's. "Man, them broads can be a pain, can't they? They give you a quarter and think they own you. One of them big loud ones got her wine head tore up one night and come barging in here like Hurricane Hattie and liken to kilt a little chick I'd just met at the Timbers." He sighed heavily, remembering the atrocious incident. "And I guess you know what Miss Mamie said after that? No more entertaining in the room. Meaning no more broads, naturally."

A faint smile crossed Jamie's lips as he pictured the fat broad giving Lem's chick hell. Now he knew why Lem didn't mind him staying here. But he wanted no part of Lem's cop-dodging schemes. So early next morning, armed with several want ads from the Sunday paper which he'd found stuffed under the bath tub, he made his way downtown. And many hours later, a rejoicing Jamie had a job as an elevator operator. He could hardly wait to see Lem's face when he told him the news.

"Man, you're kidding?" Lem said quickly. And Jamie, mistaking Lem's reaction for disbelief

over his great good fortune, went on to relate even the minute details which led to his find. When Jamie finished, Lem held his head in mock despair. "And here I spend half the day lining up something good for you," he groaned. "Man, the set-up is waiting. An open book. You can make more in one day with that territory Ike's got for you than you'd make in a whole year hiking some elevator up and down."

Jamie clammed up, his wounded, sheep dog's eyes avoided Lem who immediately realized his approach had lacked finesse. "Tell you what," he said, springing up out of the chair and giving Jamie a smile which displayed his gap and most of his gold fillings, "I'll get Ike to hold the book whilst you think about it." He sighed, his eyes rolling up to the ceiling. "It's sure a sweet set-up though. I would take it myself but them blue-coated bastards are on my tail right now. I can't even look cross-eyed less they right there smelling around. And you can't pay off nobody hardly any more," he lamented, turning to stare out at his beloved Avenue.

Jamie shrugged but did not vocally reject the proposal. If Lem wanted to believe he was stupid enough to get mixed up with the numbers' racket, he would go right along letting him think it. But he was ready to settle down. And he knew if he had a steady job and kept his eyes open, sooner or later he'd find the right girl to settle down with him.

And that girl stepped into his elevator one rainy morning in mid-October without even bothering to nod at him. He was old on the job now, and in his lanky, country-boy fashion, had even acquired a bit of polish. Being tall and slender with the flat hips and wide, sweeping shoulders of a flashing halfback, his uniform hung well on him.

He got along with the other operators, did his job well, and banked what little he could after paying the rent and lending Lem five here and there. His account was slow shaping up, but he really didn't mind the money spent on Lem; for, in addition to his generous nature, he was well aware that whatever Lem's motives, he had done him a great favor by taking him in when he was down to his last dollar. And despite Lem's constant ribbing, Jamie was grateful for his companionship, for he found the ways of the city baffling indeed. Though constantly surrounded by people, he had never been lonelier in his entire life. His co-workers were friendly but they were not his friends. And those faceless bodies who poured into his car, day after day, really didn't know him from a crack in the wall. Then at five o'clock sharp, the whole horde fled from the building as if it were enveloped in flames.

Then Retha Hodges glided into his elevator, breaking the shackles from his haunted heart, yet already he was her willing slave had she but known it. At lunch time, he caught sight of her again, briefly, for she

took the late lunch when the crowd reached its peak, and was soon swallowed up. He glared at the hungry mob surging past him, and for one awful moment, his vexation was such that he thought of taking the whole load to the basement and leaving them to find their way up the best they could.

At five o'clock he missed her completely and was so shaken that he actually toyed with the idea of asking Ben, their starter, about her. But by the time he was free, Ben had vanished as had practically every other soul in the huge building. When he finally pushed through the revolving doors, dusk had firmly set in, and, mumbling to himself, he slowly made his way to the corner where he waited for the light to change. Banging his fists, one against the other, he stared up at the darkened tower of City Hall where a host of unseen starlings chattered madly like women at a bridge party, then glared at the long succession of Jersey buses inching around the corner, spitefully blocking his way, unaware that he was not going anywhere anyway. As Lem was only too willing to point out, he was standing still in his own little rut.

"Damn Lem. Damn him to hell," he muttered, startling several pedestrians standing near him. Then, he whirled and blindly walked in the opposite direction.

* * * * *

In no time at all, she was smiling at him, and he had even managed to learn her name. But then he

made no further progress whatsoever. And daily he grew more desperate; he simply had to make her aware of him as a person, not as just another operator. Yet the more he pondered the situation, the more insoluble it seemed. Then, against his better judgment, he sought advice from Lem.

"Man, you'd better let that chick alone," said Lem, standing flat-footed in yellow striped socks and flowered undershorts. "Don't you know them white-collar broads are the worse skirts under th' sun? They're looking for some square who'll set 'em up in the suburbs like they're queen of th' May." He yanked the stogie from his mouth. "Forget that broad, man, and come on down to th' Timbers with me where you can get your kicks without paying with your own blood!"

Jamie, already in bed, snorted furiously. "What make you think you know so damn much? You always talking outta both sides of your mouth but you ain't got no more than I got."

Lem cackled as he strutted over to the bed. "Man, I told you before, ain't none of us got nothing, and we ain't ever going to git nothing. So why don't you stop whining? That broad you lusting after ain't thinking 'bout you. Her folks done sent her to college and they expects her to marry somebody with more education than she got.

"I bet you anything, if she ain't already got her eye on some lawyer or some teacher, she got some joker stashed away in medical school.

Man, her folks ain't gonna have nobody like you messin' 'round anybody like her."

Jamie swung with the pillow then, but Lem ducked away, laughing fiendishly, and scooted up the hall to the bathroom.

The next day was rainy and dreary and Jamie's spirits were exceedingly low for somehow that morning he had missed seeing Retha. Around ten he took his break and skitted through the damp mist down to the corner cafeteria. He had not had breakfast and briefly, as he moved through the line, he considered buying bacon and eggs but his stomach rebelled so he settled for two cups of coffee. Then, as he sauntered away from the cashier, he thought, how nice if one of the cups were for Retha. So vivid then was the image of her in his mind that when he actually saw her sitting alone, he thought surely he was still day-dreaming. Then she smiled and motioned for him to sit with her and his heart took wings.

Despite the horrid, clammy weather, she sparkled like a newly minted coin, and he heard Lem's sarcastic warning ringing in his ears: "Her folks don't want nobody like you messin' 'round anybody like her." But he quickly forgot Lem in his desperate effort to find something fetching to say to her. Almost in the next moment, it seemed, she had to leave. He stood also, confused and bedazzled, on the verge of leaving with her.

"No, please stay and finish your

coffee," she requested with such delightful charm that he fairly blossomed. She laughed then, a pure, clear sound which fell upon his ears like distant church chimes. And then to his utter astonishment, he heard her saying that perhaps they would meet again tomorrow at break time.

Jamie left the building the following morning staring down at his feet, bleakly wondering if they carried him on still another of his fool's errands. Pushing through the revolving doors, he ran down the steps that led into the restaurant. He saw her at once, sitting at the same table; joy transformed his face, and, for the moment, his shyness left him. "I missed you this morning," he said. "I thought maybe you didn't come in."

"I came early," she said, "the work has piled up tremendously." Then she nodded toward the counter. "Don't you want coffee today?"

He moved his chair closer, his eyes devouring her face. "Naw, I don't drink it much," he answered, not really concentrating on what he was saying. "I hadn't et breakfast yesterday."

A faint flush stained her cheeks and instantly he was conscious of his speech. People like her didn't use words like "et", and he didn't usually any more. In Charlotte, before he met Caro, he had gone to night school for two years, but maybe he'd better hunt around for something to brush up again. He couldn't have his girl blushing at his bad language.

Retha gave him a dazzling smile, but his self-doubts had tied his tongue now. Then in one of the most exquisite gestures he'd ever seen, she lifted her hand and touched his own as it quivered near the sugar container. "I have to leave now, Jamie. We're terribly rushed just now, but tomorrow perhaps . . . ?" Her dark eyes slipped into his, and he felt her hand, warm and soft and burning him to his very soul and he was so filled with love for her he could have wept.



Thereafter, morning coffee became a habit with them, and soon they were lunching together. His shyness with her all but vanished as he gained more knowledge of her life away from the building. But in spite of all the moments spent together at break and luncheon, after work ended Retha Hodges was still as lost to him as the moon.

For a while he convinced himself that this was only a temporary situation and spent his evenings exploring the city, sometimes even venturing into one of the movie houses on Chestnut street. But it was no good in the movies alone when your girl is God only knows where, so he decided to spend his free time on another self-improvement kick. Wandering into Leary's one evening, he came across a used English textbook. But not until he

noted the gleam in Lem's eyes did he realize his error in bringing the book home. For up until that very moment he had given Lem the impression that the girl on the job no longer interested him.

Lem swooped the book up from its wrappings and waved it high above his head. "Man, what you doing with this junk? *English Essentials!* You gonna ruin your brains, if you got any. You talk all right, almost as good as me." Then he made as if to throw the book into the waste basket and Jamie hopped up with a violent start. Lem laughed, then laid the book on the dresser, but Jamie's nerves remained coiled for he knew Lem wasn't through with the matter. And he was in the right mood for getting things off his chest, too.

Then as he stood ready for battle, the solution to the problem of seeing Retha after work suddenly came to him. He would get a place of his own. And the idea, such a remote possibility minutes before and now so very real, filled him with exultation.

Lem saw the moist brown eyes come to life as the thin angular face glowed from an inner fire, and for the first time he realized that Jamie might soon move out of his reach. "So, you're still messing round that broad from West Philly, huh?" he exclaimed as he flung himself into the chair and ran a finger along the pencil-mark mustache. "Man, she's gonna cut your guts out and wear 'em for beads. I thought you had *some* sense?"

But Jamie did not move nor had the slight smile of wonder left his face, and Lem knew he was on the wrong track. He knocked the ashes from his cigar then pointed it at Jamie, "I guess you know the only way you can get to first base with a dame like that is to have folding cabbage and lots of it?"

Jamie knew what Lem was building up to, but in spite of himself he listened. Indeed, he'd been thinking along similar lines himself. His eyes grew moody, his lips took on a pouting look. His common sense told him that Retha Hodges wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole if he got mixed up with the numbers. But would she ever have to know—?

Lem lit a fresh stogie but kept one eye on Jamie to know just when to bring on his clincher. Then, finally, he stood up. "Tell you what," he began, "suppose we walk down to th' Timbers later on? I hear Ike might drop by sometime tonight. And you know he can't hold that book open forever; he's losing money, man. That territory's worth \$5000 a day if it's worth a penny."

Jamie's heart thumped like a kettle drum. He wished Lem would shut up, yet desperately he wanted to know how much he'd make with such a book. The \$42.50 take home pay he got now hardly took him around the corner. Then, finally, the walls and the ceiling closed in on him. "I think I'll take a walk," he said, grabbing frantic-

ally for his jacket. "I'll see you later."

With his cigar delicately poised like a stunted foil, Lem came forward, "At the Timbers?" he asked softly.

Jamie hesitated. "Maybe," and he practically ran from the room.

The mild November night hung heavily on his shoulders as he moved wearily down the Avenue toward Broad street. He had little idea where he was going and couldn't care less if Retha Hodges were not with him. Then the need to see and talk with her overwhelmed him. He found a phone booth in a crowded cut-rate drug store and called her. She agreed to meet him at a bar out on Girard avenue near 56th street.

She was waiting for him and he was so glad to see her his voice left him momentarily.

"It's late," he said finally. "I know you ought to be home . . ."

She shook her head. "It's not quite eleven. I live just around the corner."

His heart thudded at the mention of how near her home was to him. Then he asked the question that was burning a hole in his brain. "If I had a place, would you come to see me, sometime?"

She regarded him for a long moment, and he wasn't sure whether she wanted to laugh or spit in his face. Then she smiled and told him she would perhaps, sometime.

He tried to grin but didn't quite make it. It's not good enough, he

thought despairingly, but it was better than an outright no. But what he really wanted to know, he couldn't ask; or rather, didn't want to risk having answered. But still. But still. "I love you," he blurted out before he was aware the words had even formed on his tongue.

"I know," she said quietly, then looked away from him.

Damn, he thought frantically. Damn, damn, damn. Wasn't she going to say anything more? Then she spoke again and brought the roof down on his head.

"Jamie, I'm engaged to a fellow in law school. He's my brother's room mate at Howard."

"Howard—?"

"Howard University in Washington," she told him. "He finishes in June; we plan to marry then."

"Oh," Jamie said, and the word took off, swirling around the room like a stunned insect.

"Oh," he finally said again, his mind unable to think of any other word, his heart a ton of lead threatening to pull him through the floor.

She touched his hand, "Don't look like that, Jamie. I know I should have told you earlier, but I kept putting it off, thinking that once you weren't so—so alone, maybe you could better cope with the situation."

He stood in front of the Timbers Bar, a tall, lonely figure, fingering the change in his pocket. The November air was chilled now, cutting through his jacket, but he seemed not to notice.

Then Lem came out and con-

fronted him. "I been looking for you, man. Come on in, Ike's waiting . . . ?"

But Jamie merely shook his head, his eyes squinting at the dimly outlined Lem. "I just came to let

you know I'm cutting out," he said finally.

Then before Lem could reply, Jamie turned and walked on down the Avenue, his shoulders bent against the night.



Anita R. Cornwell, via "Jamie Brown," once again makes an appearance in the literary section of the magazine after enriching the latter half of 1965 with three essays for **NEGRO DIGEST** (which appeared in July, October and November).

African descent. It involves the scholarly interpretation of that work and its essence. It also involves the inclusion of work by non-Africans if that work contains what Mr. Jahn considers the essential qualities of *Negritude*. Thus, one finds in the *Bibliography* certain persons of non-African background listed while the work of some people of African descent is missing. And here, it should be noted that NEGRO DIGEST erred in its mention of both the tri-language and the Praeger editions of the *Bibliography*: Mr. Jahn DID NOT omit certain writers, such as Lerone Bennett Jr., as was stated in the magazine. Mr. Bennett's four books are non-fiction and non-autobiography, and thus do not fall under Mr. Jahn's "literature" designation. Mr. Bennett's works, and others of similar nature, will be listed in an upcoming Jahn volume.

Perhaps Mr. Jahn's second best-known book is his *Through African Doors* which describes much of his travels, primarily by foot, over West Africa. It is a fascinating work. In Nigeria, Mr. Jahn collaborated with another German Africanist, Ulli Beier, in the founding of Black Orpheus, the now-famous literary magazine. He became friends with many of Africa's writers and intellectuals, and the Jahns frequently play host to their African friends at Messel.

Mr. Jahn's African friends include Leopold Sedar Senghor, the poet-president of Senegal, whose poems Mr. Jahn has translated into German (*Botschaft Und Anruf. Samliche*

Gedichte). His friends of African descent include the Antillian co-father of *Negritude*, poet-dramatist Aimé Césaire, and the American poet Paul Vesey (Samuel Allen). Mr. Jahn recently translated M. Césaire's play *The Tragedy of King Christophe* into German, and he did the same for Mr. Vesey's *Ivory Tusks* a decade ago. Mr. Jahn also has translated into German other works by M. Senghor and M. Césaire.

In 1964, Mr. Jahn came to America on a speaking tour and succeeded in dazzling audiences with his "revolutionary" ideas about African and Neo-African rhythms. To people accustomed to the comfortable view that anything African is primitive and uncomplicated, Mr. Jahn's lucid analysis of the intricacies and patterns of African musical forms was myth-shattering. Nevertheless, he makes it clear that an understanding and appreciation of these subtleties are essential to a full and meaningful grasp of the differences between African and European approaches to both poetry and music. It was especially provoking for some of Mr. Jahn's audiences to hear him state that a Willie Smith blues, for example, was no less complex than a work by Mozart, only different.

This April, Mr. Jahn will leave matters in the hands of his competent full-time secretary and fly down to Dakar as a guest of the First World Festival of Negro Arts. There can be few guests on hand for that grand occasion more deserving to be present.—HWF

Negro History Extravaganza

The Frank London Brown Negro History Club's "Evening of Culture" was the most impressive of the many Negro history presentations in Chicago last February. Praise is due guest speaker **John Hope Franklin**, and "unforgettable" is understating the portrayal of Harriet Tubman by monologist **Val Gray**, with text by JET associate editor **Francis Ward**.

should be taken in by them any more. Yet we feel a thin edge of uncertainty. Mammy Faubus protests just a shade too much. We notice that she calls Simple not a quality "man" but a quality "Nigra." Mammy Eastland laughs a little too heartily at Colonel Semple's little joke about her not using more than half of his donation to her church to buy herself snuff. Is it possible that these two have been corrupted by the rebellious young whites, who clamor to eat with us and go to school with us? Could Mammy Faubus and Mammy Eastland be secret members of the NAAWP?—Dudley Randall



The blackness of the Negro's skin has been the exploited scapegoat in several crucial phases of American development. America's debt to the color black is so great that it would be more than "fitting and proper" that the stars in the U.S. flag were black. For example, when America needed an abundance of cheap slave labor to produce her one-crop economy, cotton, and this set the basis for American development and strength enough to throw off the British, the color of the African's skin was the rationalization for enslaving him to do this strategic task. When the North wanted to subdue the South because the South was essentially becoming another culture and society altogether, it used the black skin or "slavery issue" again to justify its actions. After the Civil War when the North and South wanted to come into closer harmony with each other and the Southerners wanted more solidarity among their own, the black man was made the target of Southern hostility to unify the people of the South, and the North abdicated its responsibility to the black man to appease the South and help unify the nation. The last phase was given the name Jim Crow or Jim Crowism. The books, *The Strange Career Of Jim Crow* (Oxford Press, \$4.50), by C. Vann Woodward and *Anti-Negro Thought In America 1900-1930* (Louisiana State

University Press, \$6.50), by I. A. Newby both deal with Jim Crowism.

C. Vann Woodward's book is an easy reading of the history of Jim Crow ideas and ideals in America. But in the process of revealing this development he helps to put to rest certain myths about the American Southland. It has often been stated by Southerners that Jim Crowism, or segregation, was a time honored and ancient Southern tradition. The simple truth of the matter is that Negroes and whites lived in astonishingly close association with one another during slavery, through Reconstruction, and down to the beginnings of Jim Crowism. In some cases the "time honored tradition" was less than thirty, forty, or fifty years at most. Another common claim is the unchangeability of the Southerner. The truth of the matter is the Southerner has had to accommodate himself to more changes of a drastic and far reaching nature than his Northern counterpart.

In helping to clear up the questions surrounding these Southern "folk myths" C. Vann Woodward has done a great deal to bring thinking on these subjects and facts into closer harmony. But another equally important point he makes, rather forcefully, is the fact that the Sumnerian thesis that, "stateways can not change folkways," or the notion that, "you

can not legislate men's hearts," is not really true. In fact, and he gives examples, law has changed men's thinking and their hearts as well. He points out that things invariably get worse after Jim Crow laws are passed for Negroes. On the other hand they get measurably better when such laws are repealed or changed. If in fact it were so that "stateways can not change folkways," then there would be no need to codify laws at all because people would always abide by their "folkways" and no law would in fact do anything to change their actions and activities.

Dr. Woodward's book is light in that it is easy to read and understand. It is weighty in that it is able to eradicate and eliminate some rather ponderous notions with convincing and realistic logic. The book is sensibly aimed at limited targets and no pretenses are made about its being the final word on the subject. Even now, we are still too close to many of the actual events to historically evaluate all of the forces at work in the Jim Crow phenomenon. Within the limitations that he and time placed upon his effort, Dr. Woodward's book is an excellent work, well worth the reading.

Dr. Newby's *Anti-Negro Thought In America 1900-1930*, subtitled, "Jim Crow's Defense," is a very good companion to Dr. Woodward's book. Dr. Newby's book is a very detailed and well documented book. In certain aspects of its scholarly presentation he frightens the reader because he upsets so many of the hallowed myths we have held about the white American intelligentsia. We have come to believe very deeply in their wisdom and sense of fair play that we take it for granted. Dr. Newby's book helps to see the intelligentsia more realistically. He points out that it was in fact great men of science and learning that provided the theoretical and philosophical basis for

Jim Crow and racism. He describes them thusly, "They were trained in scientific methodology. Products of the new graduate seminars at Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Chicago, and Harvard universities, they were professional . . . in every sense of the term, and their researches carried the authority of professional competence. They were responsible for the anti-Negro prejudices which pervades the study of these subjects after 1900."

There are two other points that he makes that contribute immeasurably to the over-all worth of the book. First he states, "They (Southerners) knew and liked and, in their own way, respected individual Negroes, but they were also convinced of the race's inferiority and the necessity of maintaining white supremacy. Inclined on one hand toward kindness and paternalism, but faced on the other with the actualities of segregation and discrimination . . ." In order to really understand the Southern mentality one must be able to understand and appreciate this fact of life. The result is an inevitable internal tension which had to be explained away and the scientists, namely the psychologists, biologists, anthropologists, etc., combined with the historians and religious leaders, gave the racists the necessary "outs". But the above quote also points deeper into the kind of contradictions and paradoxes that faced most Southerners. They learned to live very well with the inherent irrationality this presents, and logic that would stop some people cold, for the Southerner, is no problem if it anyway revolves around race.

Secondly, he makes another point that we would all be well advised to remember. In quoting Charles B. Galloway, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, "Intelligence and wealth will and should control

the administration of governmental affairs," he repeats what many of us have come to realize is the crux and reason for much of the Negro's subjugation. To attempt to raise above our present status without a methodology based upon this fact is gross folly.

Dr. Newby's and Dr. Woodward's books are an absolute must for anyone who expects to be fluent on the

question of segregation. Many of us base our opinions and conclusions upon the fact that we have lived segregated lives. But this is not sufficient in light of books like the ones reviewed above. To articulate realistically and fully appreciate what you have lived in a segregated society one still must be in command of many of the facts presented in these two books.—Brooks Johnson

Howard N. Meyer, in his biography of Ulysses S. Grant, *Let Us Have Peace*, (Collier, \$2.95), tries to correct the portrait of General Grant painted by prejudiced historians who scorned anyone who advocated interracial justice.

They have associated Grant's name with drunkenness, corruption, and failure, but the picture of Grant which emerges from this book is of a man with a fundamental human decency which makes him a rival of the slave-holding paragon, Robert E. Lee.

In contrast to Lee, Grant gave his only slave his freedom two years before the Civil War, at a time of financial distress when he needed the money he could have got from selling him. From a position of neutrality toward slavery, he came to believe in freedom and citizenship for Negroes, as he observed how they guided and helped the Union soldiers in unknown and hostile country, and later how they worked and fought in the Union armies.

Grant established camps for the slaves who ran away to his army, which provided them with jobs and education, and which were prototypes for the Freedman's Bureau.

At his inauguration as President, he said, "Let us have peace." But he knew there could be no lasting peace without justice. Perhaps the greatest

achievement of his presidency was the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment assuring Negroes the right to vote.

His presidency, like those of Truman, Eisenhower, and Lyndon Johnson, was touched with corruption, but he himself was blameless, his only fault being his having too much trust in supposed friends.

This is a book for young people, written in a clear style without footnotes or index. It is recommended for schools, as it gives an unbiased picture of Grant undistorted by prejudice against his fair-mindedness. Its low price and objective treatment also recommend it to adults as an introduction to Grant before going on to the more detailed studies mentioned in Howard Meyer's acknowledgement.—Dudley Randall

GIVE
AMERICAN
CANCER
SOCIETY

The first 82 pages of *Freedom—When?* (Random House, \$4.95) is more or less a tribute to CORE by outgoing national director James Farmer, but upon managing to struggle through this super sales pitch, one discovers, with much relief, that Farmer is not merely a salesman or cheerleader, but rather a man who has exercised leadership these past five years with open eyes and keen mind. Page 83 introduces the chapter, "Black Nationalists and White Liberals," in which Farmer undertakes the difficult task of explaining the difference between Black Nationalists (i.e., individuals who are "aggressively proud of the black community—someone who sees great value in maintaining the community . . .") and Black Nationalist organizations. Farmer is not, of course, hung up on such absurdity as trying to define who the devil is, but the eloquent civil rights veteran did in fact come to terms with the relevance contained in a young CORE worker's appeal, "Brother Farmer, we've got to dig being black." Although he fails to hide his nervousness in using the term, a term he does not especially like, Farmer writes brilliantly of the constructive tenets of black nationalism. Without allowing his compassion to disturb his sense of exigency, Farmer projects the role of whites in the civil rights movements—the roles they *cannot* play as well as those they can play. Still in the same chapter, he devotes considerable space to the late Malcolm X. Farmer is, in part, perceptive when speaking of the man he obviously respected, but not without the ambivalence common to discussions of the most misinterpreted figure of the decade. As he was doing when it was even more unpopular than today, Farmer once again supports the contention that the Negro community must receive special attention—"Offering him equal rights, even equal opportunity, at this late date, without giving him a special boost, is the kind of cruel joke American individualism has played on the poor throughout American history"—and, in the same context, he speaks of "historical justice" or what might be interpreted as *it's time for whitey to start paying some long overdue dues!* Farmer observes the peculiar legalities that exist in the southern region of this land relative to interracial marriage, and although he only touches briefly on the subject, he is on sound moral ground. An account of his second trip to Africa, "Africa Revisited," finds him relatively sophisticated in the realm of international politics. He understates the case, perhaps intentionally, but nevertheless makes the point that this nation's activity on that continent is far from pure, and calls for redirection of American foreign policy in Africa—reminding us that "time is running out." Farmer devotes the final chapter to summing up the results of the rights war to date and points out many bare truths that should, hopefully, shatter our illusions. It is plain that Farmer, though he goes on record as CORE's number one fan, does not depart the organization thinking we are almost home. The ever articulate ordained minister—who couldn't bring himself to preaching the Gospel in this troubled land—concludes his book on a note of "overcoming," but it is a significantly mild note. Farmer the idealist is much too practical to dream away the gutty truth rendered some 72 pages earlier: "America is racist and it is a man called Negro who is specially victimized beyond his class and beyond any other formal classifications one might coin."—David Llorens

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading the latest issue of NEGRO DIGEST, and I find it an interesting and illuminating publication. NEGRO DIGEST displays the ability of growing and developing with the changing times.

In the February issue, I especially enjoyed the articles by Sterling Stuckey and John Hope Franklin, Toni Cade's short story, and the excerpt from Lerone Bennett's *Confrontation: Black and White*.

I have observed, within the last few months, that you have published works by some of the newer, militant writers, such as LeRoi Jones and Bobb Hamilton (editor of *Soulbook*).

Rolland Snellings
New York, New York

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on the Negro History issue (February, 1966), one of the best in this series that has so far been published.

John Henrik Clarke
African World Bookshelf
New York, New York

Dear Editor:

Eloise Greenfield's story, "Karen's Spring," (January, 1966) was very, very good. Yours is an excellent magazine.

Lois C. Solvin
Louisville, Kentucky

Dear Editor:

Just love the way you took on "Manchild!"

Zack Gilbert
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Editor:

When I resided in Chicago, I began a pleasant acquaintance with your magazine. The miles separating the source of your publication and my present residence have not dimmed my enthusiasm for the ideas that you print.

Ellen Carter
Baltimore, Md.

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on a truly remarkable Negro History (February) issue of NEGRO DIGEST. Every American Negro can be proud of the excellent selections of the subjects and the highly qualified writers. The issue should be on the desk of every Negro high school and college student in America.

I am so glad you included Lerone Bennett's chapter from *Confrontation: Black and White*.

To Ossie Davis, my personal compliments for re-discovering a man, Malcolm X, whom few of us, this writer included, really knew. I now realize that Malcolm X deliberately lived dangerously, teetering on the thin line that sometimes separated the still lucid world from the world of complete confusion and frustration. Ossie Davis presented Malcolm X and his irrepressible inner conflicts in a new dimension.

The accompanying verse, "One Year Ago," by David Llorens, was a fitting requiem to the piece by Ossie Davis.

Judge Raymond Pace Alexander
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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